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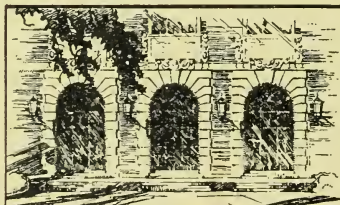
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SHELF.

LETTER.

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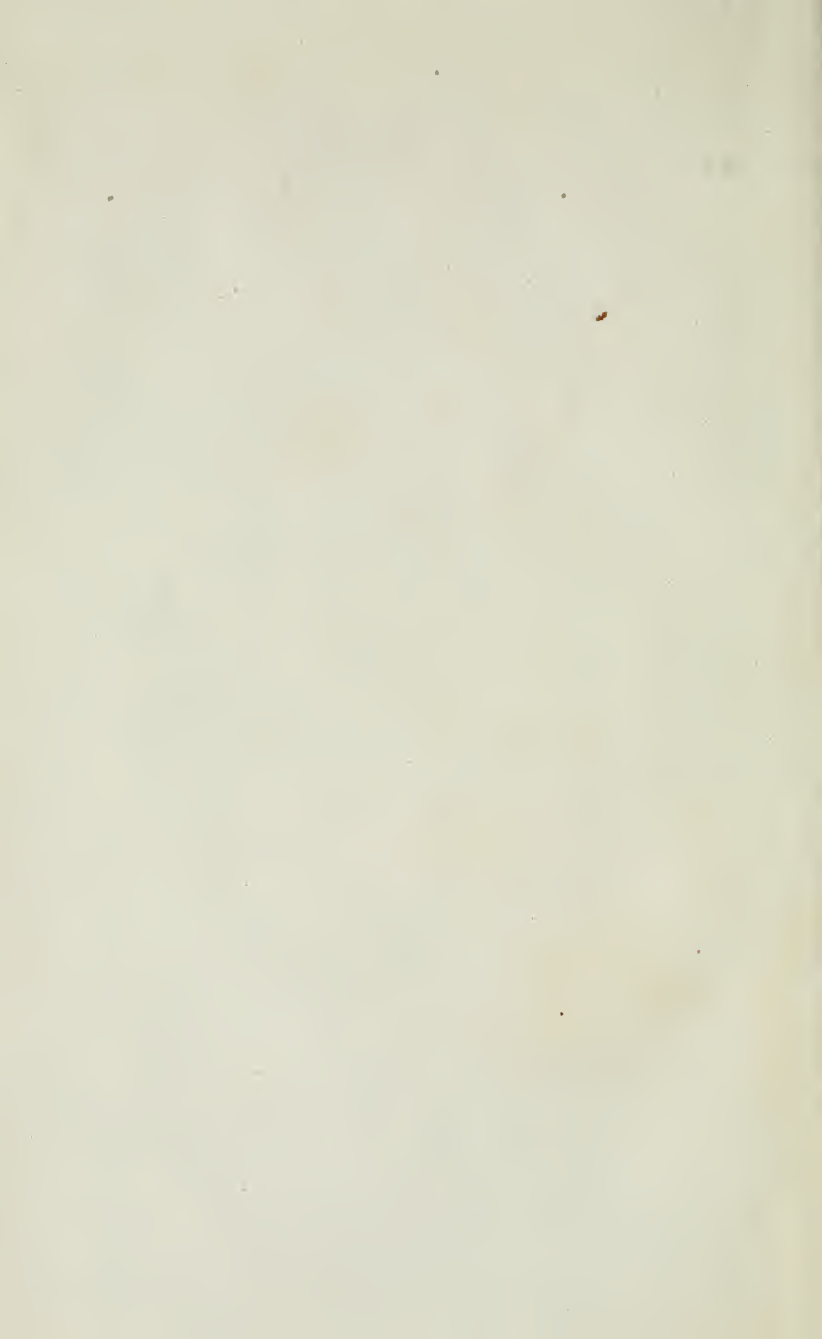


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BLOUNT TEMPEST.

VOL. I.

Edg. Hornby
BLOUNT TEMPEST. *1864*

BY

THE REV.

J. C. M. BELLEW.

"Ah me! for aught that ever I could read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth;
* * * * *
And ere a man hath power to say, Behold!
'The jaws of darkness do devour it up';
So quick bright things come to confusion."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1865.

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JOHN CHILDS AND SON, PRINTERS.

16 Mar 60 Chino

OF



BLOUNT TEMPEST.

CHAPTER I.

A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.



OMEWARD bound !

Every Englishman, who has been banished from his country to serve his country, knows the magic influence of this phrase ! A man has given up his command, surrendered his books, papers, accounts. Everything has been examined, audited, passed, signed, sealed, and delivered, and he has no more to do. Suddenly he finds himself detached.

“A fish out of water,” or “the right man in the wrong place,” are familiar forms of speech ; but they would inadequately convey a notion of the out-of-place feeling which possesses an old soldier,

after years of foreign service (especially of regimental duty), who finally closes the orderly-book, pitches his pen out of window, takes down his cap from its accustomed peg, and glancing round the white-washed walls, the dusky faces of the clerks, receives his final "Salaam," and leaves the office bungalow, with the feelings of a man out of employ.

Colonel Willoughby Massey, commanding the — Light Dragoons, had made over his charge to the senior officer of his regiment. He had visited his mess for the last time, bid his comrades farewell, sent in his papers to the Commander-in-chief, and was—"Homeward Bound."

Neither old, nor yet young; neither rich, nor yet poor; when the time arrived for embarking at Garden Reach, Calcutta, Colonel Massey shook off the dust of India from his feet with a will. He detested the country, from the moment he first caught sight of its long flat shores at the Sandheads, to the moment he left it. It had been his fate! As the parish labourer hates the poor-house, so had he hated India. He regarded it as the "union" of well-born paupers; and its irksome existence as penal servitude for people con-

victed of being younger sons ! The Colonel was a younger son. He had been taught to know the fact, to realize it, and to break his spirit over its contemplation, from his cradle upwards.

Those domestic preachers who preach at young children in all their moods and tempers, inflicting morals upon their laches, and erecting schools of ethics out of their good behaviour, had taught Willoughby Massey to "remember that *he* had to make his way in the world."

It was quite another matter with his elder brother Gerald. Whatever he did was right, for he was his father's heir ; and his way in the world was made !

This chief article of the domestic creed had taken deep root in Willoughby Massey's youthful mind. It had sunk down into the soil, and brought forth much fruit. It made him indifferent to home, and glad to get away from it. When he got away it made him resolute to be independent.

Having received, at a very early age, an appointment as Cornet in his Majesty's — Dragoon Guards, his youthful follies were sown in York, Canterbury, and Dublin.

At the former of these cities, the Leger week,

and the Annual Hunt Ball, precipitated a crisis in his history.

On attaining the rank of Lieutenant, he at the same time rose to that of a lover. The pretty but penniless younger daughter of a West-Riding squire captivated his heart. He proposed for her, and was accepted under conditional reference to the papa. This involved another reference, viz. to Willoughby Massey's father, who scouted the idea of anything so "preposterous," as he was pleased or rather displeased to term it, and once again reiterated the chief article of the domestic creed, "Remember that you have to make your own way in the world."

The paternal sermon had been preached once too often.

"I *will* remember," said Willoughby. "My father grudges me an allowance, while he lavishes his money on my brother. He shall find I have taken him at his word, and will ask no further favours."

He married the young lady; exchanged into a regiment under orders for India; spent years in that expatriation; had fever; touches of "liver;" went up-country, and did his share of fighting.

The monotony of Indian life was to the last degree irksome and oppressive to him. But he did his duty conscientiously, and rose in his regiment luckily, "making his own way in the world," and troubling his father or his brother as little as they troubled him.

After some years of married life, death not only deprived him of his father, but also of his companion, leaving him with an only child, a boy, whose years and constitution had already warned him that it was time for the child to be sent "home,"—that is, to England. Colonel Massey consequently determined to apply for leave, and to take the child himself. His application having been granted by the Commander-in-Chief, the Colonel wrote to England, apprising his wife's family of his intended return.

"I shall proceed as far as Malta by the mail, and then take a passage on board one of the Italian steamers, so as to visit Naples and Rome and go on to Florence, where I see that my old school-fellow and chum, Geoffrey Tempest, is now minister. I shall return direct by Genoa, Marseilles, and through Paris to England. I intend to start by the next monthly mail, so on receipt

of this you had better, in writing to me, direct 'Post Restante, Florence.' I shall write you from thence as soon as I arrive, and you will not receive my letter many days before you see me in person.

"Now that I am coming home, you may as well send me any Launcester news, or a paper to put me 'au courant' of passing events. Since my father's death I have scarcely heard a word from Launcester. My brother Gerald and I rarely cross letters, so that I am grossly ignorant of all the present associations of what you are pleased to call that 'lyric word'—home."

On the 13th of the following month, one of the early months of the year, and shortly after "gun fire," ere the scorching sun streamed down upon Fort William, or pretentious Chowringhee; while judges of the Supreme Court or of the Suddur, civilians, merchants, ladies, and belles, were hurrying along the "Course" or across the Maidhán, riding, driving, or walking in the make-believe of taking exercise; while squatting natives invited English breakfast-eaters to speculate in "tupsey-muchhlee;" while the wearers of broad-brimmed topees stalked along

the side of the Hooghly, discussing, with looks of tremendous self-importance, the small items of yesterday's affairs at the various secretariats, Colonel Willoughby Massey drove in his buggy down to Garden Reach, waving as he went a last farewell to many a familiar face, and embarked for "home."

In due course having arrived at Malta, and parted company with his fellow-passengers from India, he and his young son (named after him but having that name commonly abbreviated into "Willy") were compelled to wait a day or two before a steamer from Sicily arrived. At length the looked-for vessel came into port, and the Colonel had the delight of enjoying the hope and desire of many a year. He planted his feet once again on European soil. He realized the dream of his life, and saw Naples and Rome.





CHAPTER II.

FLORENCE.



HAT exquisite pathos there is in those lines in "In Memoriam" where the "divinely gifted man,"—

"Whose life in low estate began,"

"looks back on what hath been," and asks of the man of narrower fate, the "one that was his earliest mate,"—

"Does my old friend remember me?"

Colonel Massey saw Naples, and did *not* die! He was impatient to see old faces, and renew acquaintance with old friends. Old places, therefore, had little power to make his chariot-wheels tarry. Without pretending to that eagle-like rapidity of vision which some transatlantic travellers affect to possess, seeing Rome in a day,

Italy in a week, Europe in a month, and England in forty-eight hours, while obliged to wait Cunard's convenience, nevertheless the Colonel "did" his Vesuvius, Pompeii, St Peter's, and Colosseum, with a rapidity that betokened the soundness of his limbs.

The very places he had been hoping all his life to visit, were reached at last, and then the dominating feeling of his mind was a desire to get away from them.

Siste, Viator! Thousands of eager tourists experience, like the Colonel, the realization of long-cherished anticipations, but nevertheless feel with him the same carelessness or indifference after viewing what they came so far to see.

Whatever were the objects or places he visited, whether at Naples or Rome, he appeared always to be comparing them with Florence. If he looked down upon the Tiber, he spoke of the Arno, and when he gazed round St Peter's, he talked of Savonarola. His mind was outstripping his body, and travelling in advance, was, with the poet, asking,—

"Does my old friend remember me?"

Colonel Massey and Geoffrey Despencer Tempest,

Minister of the Court of St James's at the Grand Ducal Court of Florence, had, when boys, been educated together at Fontes Court Abbey in the West Riding of Yorkshire. Among its ruins they had learned their Greek plays and indulged in the lighter study of "Hide, and go seek." Years, long years had separated them; but the lapse of time had not eaten away and destroyed, it had only overgrown and concealed, the affection of one of the two, whose first and great desire in returning to Europe was to meet with his boyhood's friend, and see whether he remained faithful to his youthful attachment.

On arriving, at length, at Florence, Colonel Massey had neither patience nor inclination to look at the rooms in the Hotel to which he was conducted.

The servant who had charge of "Willy" would see to that. Scarce allowing time for the luggage to be deposited, the Colonel jumped into a vehicle, and ordered himself to be driven to the Chancellerie of the English Minister!

Can any two people, two elements, two anythings be mentioned or conceived more incongruous than an impatient traveller and that

imperturbably placid member of an embassy called an Attaché?

An Attaché never hurries for any man. Self-possession is the chief attribute of his calling. He learns it at the bottom of the diplomatic ladder even in dealing with such gauche bores as English travellers, and he cultivates it to the top of his bent, when striving to enact the Stratford de Redcliffe *rôle* with Emperors and Sultans.

On entering the Chancellerie, Colonel Massey found it tenanted by two persons, the one an unpaid Attaché, the other a man, whose dress, ring, chain, seals, ungloved hands, and thick-grown beard, proclaimed him a courier.

The contrast between them was very striking, but not more striking than their employment.

The first impression upon the Colonel's mind was that some clothes-man of the Hollywell Street district had made a descent upon Florence; and commencing with the household of her Majesty's Minister, was purchasing the tarnished epaulettes, gold cuffs, and collars, that had done duty in by-gone years at the Court of St James's!

There was ample time allowed the visitor to make any amount of notes or observations. Except a careless glance from the Attaché as the former entered the office, a sort of "who-are-you,-and-what-do-you-want?" glance, no further notice was taken of him. "One at a time," and "we can only see a certain number of people in a day, the rest must wait until to-morrow," being the system of all such establishments, English or Foreign, throughout the world.

The Colonel discovered that it was in vain for him to exhibit impatience, or expect any inquiries to be answered until the individual who was "in possession of the house" had been despatched. So sauntering about the room, and waiting his turn, he amused himself by watching the proceedings of the young diplomatist and the courier.

An open trunk was upon the Chancellerie table, out of which, one by one, the latter was engaged in removing, and exhibiting, various articles of dress, which, to the surprise of the looker-on, all belonged to a female's wardrobe. Every article was duly scheduled by one as it was called over by the other.

“One pine-patterned shawl,” cried the courier.

“One pine-patterned shawl,” repeated the scribe.

“An embroidered scarf,” said the first.

“An embroidered scarf,” answered the other, glancing at the article of attire—“Upon my veracity, a most remarkable scarf too. Worn by Mrs Noah probably when she joined the state procession out of the ark.”

The Colonel smiled, and thought within himself that it was well suited for an archæological museum.

One or two trinkets, a writing-case containing a few letters, and a pair of child’s shoes, were next scheduled.

Among other things that lay upon the table was an English newspaper, closed in the folds in which it had passed through the Post Office. It would probably have escaped observation and been thrown into the waste-paper basket of the Chancellerie, had it not been that the upper fold exposed to view the commencement of the title

“THE LAUN—”

The Colonel’s eyes lighted upon the letters, and

his attention was instantly arrested. Could that paper be the "Launcester Guardian," he thought, the weekly paper of the county town near which he was born? Pooh! there might be a hundred other places in the British Gazetteer beginning with the letters "Laun!" There would be no harm however in satisfying his curiosity! So he took the paper up and opened its folds. The title ran,—

THE LAUNCESTER GUARDIAN.

SATURDAY, — —, 18—.

Every traveller knows the anxiety and curiosity with which, after even a few days' absence from his country, he seizes any English paper that comes within his reach. No passion is more universal than that of Englishmen, young as well as old, for their "paper." Somewhere or another on those eight broad pages there is certain to be pabulum that feeds the particular fancy or taste of every British man or boy. But here was not only news in general, but news in particular.

Seldom during the long years of his expatriation had Colonel Massey caught sight of the once familiar "Guardian," that weekly which the

farmers used to purchase on market-day at Lancaster when he was a boy, and take home for enjoyment with the afternoon pipe on the Sunday : that weekly, in whose "poetic corner" the Colonel recollected that he had first seen himself in print in the dulcet verses penned "On a distant view of the Lakes by W. M.," or "Lines addressed to A—g—ta, on hearing her sing 'Home, sweet Home.' By Amator."

"This is indeed a bit of luck," muttered the Colonel to himself, "to think that I should drop upon an old Lancaster Guardian the first thing on arriving in Europe ! The dear old Guardian, that I have not seen for many a year. Well, well ! Let me see, let me see what's going on in the old place."

He opened the paper, and began to read.

Farmers' advertisements, pictures of ploughs, of horses with bands of straw round their tails ; lectures at Institutes ; sermons to be preached at the parish church ; deputations from parent societies ; Town Hall tea-meetings, with tales of wonders by missionaries. These things mattered nothing to the Colonel, so he turned over the broad leaf. The Royal arms, the time of "high

water" at the Launcester bridge, and a leading article occupied the second page.

"Stupid rubbish," muttered the Colonel; "if the men who write these things put their names to them no one would read them. Ah! here's the 'Local Intelligence,'" he added, presently; "that is more in my line!"

Down the column his eye ran, and now and again a slight smile played about his mouth as he recognized the names of persons and places that had long been familiar. There had been a flower-show; the gardener of Gerald Massey, Esq., had won the silver medal. His brother's name in print sent the blood to the Colonel's cheeks. Then there was the Christmas Ball at the Assembly-Rooms. In the list of company appeared a few people that he remembered, as well as a host of whom he had never heard.

"They form a new generation, I shall be a perfect stranger among them;" and as he murmured this, his eyes fell upon a heading spaced out in large type on the next column, that painfully interested him.

“FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT ON THE LAUNE.

TEN LIVES LOST.

(Second Edition.)

“WE stop the press in publishing our second edition to announce an accident that occurred this morning about 11 A. M., which will cast a gloom over the whole neighbourhood. A large skating party assembled to breakfast at Bolton Hall in order to enjoy that winter’s pastime on the Bolton water. Among the company were Mr Leigh of Standish, Sir Bohun Trafford of Trafford, the Earl and Countess of Furness, Mr Poulett Scrope, M.P., Mr Gerald Massey, Sir Nigel Tempest, and his nephew Mr Blount Tempest, besides a large number of ladies and gentlemen from the neighbourhood.

“Sledges having been prepared for the occasion, the ladies were distributed in parties, and the gentlemen skaters, with rope-harness attached to the sledges, set out with their fair burdens to race from Bolton to the Aqueduct.

“As a precautionary measure, it was thought prudent for one or two pioneers to go forward and

try the ice under the Aqueduct, so as to prove whether it were sound, and safe for the sledges to pass. Mr Scrope, Mr Massey, and some of the labourers on the estate, proceeded upon their mission. On approaching their destination the ice seemed perfectly trustworthy, and the whole party of scouts were about returning, when Mr Massey proposed that to be more certain they should pass once under the Aqueduct themselves, and then return to report the result.

“The suggestion was agreed upon, and immediately put into execution, with, we regret to say, the most fatal consequences. Though the ice had every appearance of security, it seems that the drip from the Aqueduct above had rendered it rotten beneath the arches. The moment the weight of the skaters came upon it, the entire block beneath the bridge became disconnected. It sank like a trap beneath their feet, and precipitated them into the river. This accident might not have proved fatal, indeed it is confidently believed that those immersed would have been rescued but for the fact of the ice at once closing over their heads.

“Struggle or effort was useless; they were

drawn by the current of the river under the unbroken ice, and literally suffocated in presence of their friends. As we write, the ladders and drags have been brought to the spot, and workmen are continually breaking the ice in order to recover the dead bodies."

LATEST INTELLIGENCE. HALF-PAST 3 P.M.

"Eight out of the ten persons immersed have been recovered :

Mr Poulett Scrope, aged 35.

John Johnson, labourer, aged 40.

Thomas Johnson, his son, aged 14.

Ebenezer Hartopp (only child of widow Hartopp), aged 20.

Harry Brun, aged 50.

William Snell, aged 22.

"The two other bodies have not as yet been recognized.

"One of the most heart-rending facts in this frightful accident is the circumstance of Mr Massey's corpse being distinctly discernible under the ice. People standing upon the parapet of the aqueduct and looking down upon the frozen surface were unwilling witnesses of his death-strug-

gles, and totally unable to render him the smallest assistance. By his death it is almost unnecessary to inform our readers that we lose the representative of one of the oldest families in the county. The deceased was never married, and by his death, the extensive Massey estates devolve upon his brother, Colonel Willoughby Massey, now commanding his regiment in India."

The Chancellerie seemed set into motion and revolving before the Colonel's eyes. The air became thick and misty. Sounds like the moan of the tide's first flow filled his ears. His nerves lost their vigour, and as the paper dropped from his hands he clutched at the table and the trunk to prevent himself from falling.

The courier sprang towards him to hold him up. Even the Attaché awoke from his lethargy into animation, and proposed dashing a tumbler full of water into his face.

"That's exactly how my padrona was taken," said the former, "and all from reading a Gazette like that. Signor, it must be poisoned."

But neither the Colonel nor the Attaché heard the remark. "A scene" was the last thing

in which the guardian of the Chancellerie wished to take part. Having summoned assistance, the servants conducted the stranger into the palace, and a message was sent to the Minister to inform him of the occurrence.

While Colonel Massey was endeavouring to recover from the shock his nerves had received, her Majesty's representative, Mr Geoffrey Despencer Tempest, entered the room, and beheld his servants surrounding a figure stretched upon the sofa.

"What is the matter?" he inquired.

"Eccellenza! the signor has had a fit."

Mr Tempest advanced towards the sofa, and saw there the tall, soldier-like figure of a gentleman, apparently a stranger though a countryman.

"My poor brother!" groaned the Colonel, as he returned to consciousness.

"Your brother, sir?" said the Minister, inquiringly, as if he wished to know what brother could have produced the scene before him.

"Ay, my brother—poor Gerald, he is dead!"

"Gerald!" ejaculated Mr Tempest, "Gerald! Then you are—?"

“Willoughby Massey.”

Thus abruptly did those friends meet, who had been parted more than twenty years.

The careers of both had been distinguished without being brilliant. They had served their country, and reached middle age as trusted officers of the State.

That day of meeting was to each a living again a brief epitome of their lives. A few hours told them all that many years had produced. Indian life became familiar to the one, parliamentary and diplomatic to the other.

They dined together, and as the evening closed over sunny Florence, they sat in the verandah of the palace, looking down upon the street and the gay life moving along, and recounting their adventures in the great world to which they belonged.

Colonel Massey could hardly realize the changed position he was about to occupy. Mr Tempest knew far more of Durham-Massey than its owner, who was compelled to ask him particulars regarding his own property—how it had been managed, how maintained, how his brother Gerald had fulfilled his duties as a landlord; how he

had lived, and what he had done. Everything was information to the Colonel.

Why his brother had never married was to him a surprise. "It was," said Mr Tempest, "as much a surprise to every one. The belief in the county was that a marriage had been arranged with the Lady Fanny Howard, a younger daughter of the Earl and Countess of Furness ; but when it was expected to come off, Gerald Massey had vanished, no one knew where. He had not been seen or heard of at Durham-Massey, nor yet in London, for several months ; and all his letters had been forwarded to the care of his lawyers. Suddenly he returned to his mansion, and his lawyers with him. Steward, agents, tenants, all were in a state of commotion, and once again curiosity was roused to discover his probable objects or purposes in life.

This was the last intelligence Mr Tempest could give. The end, the death of Gerald Massey, was known to the Minister, but further particulars regarding him or the estate had not yet reached Florence.

Mr Tempest explained that he himself was a married man, that his wife and children were in

England, and that it had been arranged, as soon as the hot weather should be over, that they were to join him at Florence.

The deepening night at last warned the Colonel it was time to retire. He declined taking up his quarters at the Embassy, as he had already secured rooms for himself and his son. Promising to look in early in the morning, and join the Minister at breakfast, he rose to take his departure.

“God bless you, Willoughby ! I am delighted to see you once again after so long a parting, and to be the first to congratulate you on your becoming master of Durham-Massey.”

“Good-night, dear old fellow, it makes me feel a boy again to see you.”

“Don’t forget to bring your boy with you to breakfast.”

And so they parted.

Now the Colonel was little disposed for sleep. The exciting events of the day had banished slumber from his eyelids, so he resolved to return to his apartments, and having seen that the boy was “all right” and asleep, to light a cheroot, and take a stroll in the far-famed city.

If there is a place in the world to provoke the composition of a true Petrarchan Sonnet, surely it is Florence. Florence by day or by night, but especially by night! If Wordsworth standing upon Westminster Bridge, and contemplating London at early morn, was constrained to exclaim:—

“Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty.
Ne’er saw I, never felt a calm so deep;
The river glideth at his own sweet will.
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still”—

what would he have said and sung had he, at the same hour of summer-night, stood upon the bridge at Florence, and contemplated the city of the Medici!

There are those to whom a book is a book,
a horse a horse, a church a church,

“A primrose by the river’s brim
A yellow primrose is to him,”

and it is nothing more: those who would as soon, or perhaps sooner, have the latest edition of Shakespeare, than a copy of the first folio that may have belonged to Ben Jonson or Dick Burbage.

Any well-bred colt would be as much regarded by them as the charger that Wellington rode at Waterloo. Any beautiful piece of architecture by Gilbert Scott would seem just as interesting as the "Crown" of Canterbury, or the Nave of Westminster.

To such persons association is valueless. They regard everything *per se*.

Enough has already been revealed of Colonel Massey's character, to show that he was not a person of this description. He was still a young man,—yes, young in feeling, thought, and vigour, although he had numbered eight-and-thirty years. Almost in boyhood, as I have related, he had married a penniless girl for love, and never regretted it. There are cases in which when poverty comes in at the door, love does *not* fly out at the window. His was one. The penniless wife had been his companion; and despite the maxims of this age of gold, it may be asserted that the richest dowry a woman can bring with her to a husband's house, is the capacity and disposition to be his help-mate.

Men can work and support their wives. If they cannot and do not, they are unworthy of

having them. Let those who have worked and won this world's independence, say whether the treasure beyond all price is not a friend, counsellor, and associate at home?

"What did he get with his wife?" is the well-worn question of the world when a man marries; and if the answer be "not a shilling," society raises its eyebrows with amazement, and considers that the man who is labouring for a fortune has lost his senses when he marries without money.

Money! Great god of England's idolatry—Baal of modern Babylon, you have been worshipped over much! and many a rich and wretched home has testified that happiness demands that a woman should bring her husband a dower compared with which gold is as dross! The wife who is a man's companion makes him rich indeed.

Colonel Massey had what is called "romance" in his composition; that romance which does not alter the realities of life, but affects our view of them just as sunshine affects the landscape. The common-place would have called him "eccentric," simply because he did not move in a groove,

as common-place folk do. He was guilty of the extraordinary peculiarity of acting for himself and thinking for himself. The bell-wethers of society might gingle their bells and all the social sheep race after them in a flock, bleating a chorus of acquiescent opinion, without in the smallest degree moving or influencing him. So he had married, upon his own opinion, lived in a manner agreeable to his own opinion, and his world had been in his own home!

It was the romantic and poetic element in his nature which induced him to turn aside from his direct route home, in order not to pass by the friend of his childhood, and to see those cities of Italy, which all his life long he had desired to visit. His wishes were gratified, Naples and Rome he had beheld. His friend had welcomed him. He had enjoyed the strongly-coveted hours of intercommunion of thought with the man he loved, and now in the silence of the night, he wandered forth through Florence, to muse and to moralize.

Did his mind revert to the blind old Galileo whom England's blind poet celebrated in his epic? Did he re-people the cathedral with the

enraptured crowd, listening to their Savonarola, the greatest Christian preacher since St Paul? Did Lorenzo the Magnificent rise up before his imagination, "princeps et tyrannus," amidst those streets that he made the monuments of his fame?

Yes! he thought of them all as he wandered in his solitary midnight ramble along the streets their feet had trod centuries ago; but he thought far more of his dead wife—of the woman, the companion, who had shared all his life's trials and troubles, and with whom to have shared his present unexpected accession to riches and position, would have been the summit of worldly happiness!

"My dear, lost love!" he murmured. "Oh! had you only lived until now!"

Are we all so selfish and so egotistical as some of the humourists of our age represent us? with the lemons in the market cannot we secure an abundant supply of sweet oranges? Fortune, success, and perhaps fame, carry many more men's thoughts backwards to some grass-grown grave than they would themselves confess to the world, lest they should be suspected of sentiment.

In the hour of their triumph they lack the

pearl that should be dropped into the cup of joy! Their pleasure is chastened by the want of *the* one person, whose presence, "had they only lived until now," would have made it intense.

So was it with Willoughby Massey! He had been deeply shocked and stunned by the sudden news of his brother's death; but grief there was none! He grieved for her he loved, for her he would have given all his present fortune to recall, for her, without whom that fortune profited him little!

"Had you only lived until now!" he repeated as he passed along the bridge, and followed the bank of the Arno, watching the effects of the chequered light upon the water and upon the palaces, as the moon, seemingly in chase, now dived behind dark banks, and now burst out again, shining upon the river and the town. The inconstant light became dimmed by a mass of scudding clouds, and the objects under the shadows of the walls and houses difficult to discriminate; but the Colonel felt convinced that he saw a living form moving along the street—not openly, but stealthily, with the purpose of avoiding observation.

“Who could wish to escape my observation?” he mentally inquired. “I am a perfect stranger here—no one knows me, or can in the least care about avoiding me. It must be the old story, the poignard and the purse, your money or your life.”

So the Englishman, fancying himself likely to be attacked, prepared to practise the noble art of self-defence.

Being thoroughly on the alert, he took up his position in the middle of the road, that if any violence was contemplated, he should have the advantage of seeing his adversary's approach.

But no one approached, and it became evident to the Colonel that he was himself the person to be avoided, not that he had anything to avoid.

Simultaneously with the sense of personal security, awoke the feeling of curiosity. “What could it mean? What cause of fear could he be to any human being in Florence?” he thought.

He determined if possible to solve the mystery, and advanced upon the dark, indistinct mass he saw creeping along under the shadow of a wall. As he came nearer, he perceived

there were two persons, a male and a female, both carrying something in their arms. They were hurrying in the direction he was going, and he observed the nearer he approached, the more rapidly they hastened away.

"They must have committed a robbery," he muttered to himself, "and are now decamping with the stolen goods. What shall I do?"

"Do?" common-place people would reply, "Do, why mind your own business, and don't risk having half a foot of cold steel poked under your ribs."

But Willoughby Massey, as I have already stated, had no respect for common-place; moreover he was a soldier—and if the skulkers were robbers, he resolved that, at least, he would give them a fright; so springing out into a sharp run he endeavoured to overtake them.

The woman was much fleetier than the man, and was evidently much more lightly weighted; indeed when she had run a short distance she dropped her burden altogether, which came in contact with the Colonel's feet.

"Then you are thieves," he shouted; "but you shall not escape if I can help it," and bound-

ing forward he made way quickly upon the man. Leaving the Arno and the Ponte Vecchio, the Colonel had followed in pursuit past the Duomo, and along the Via dei Servi. The fugitives had reached, and were endeavouring to escape under shadow of, the Brunelleschian corridors of the Piazza della S.S. Annunziata, when their pursuer pressed hotly upon them.

“Qui ! qui ! here it is, caro sposo !” shouted the woman, pointing to the wall, as they approached the façaded loggia of La Santissima Annunziata.

The fellow stopped, as the Colonel thought, to confront him.

“Then he is going to show fight,” the Englishman muttered.

But he was mistaken. The man, satisfied that the stranger had halted, raised the bundle in his arms, dropped it somewhere or into something out of sight, and taking to his heels made off down the Via S. Sebastiano.

Pursuit seemed unnecessary, for the robber had surrendered the plunder.

The Colonel felt more curious to examine this, than to catch the thieves. He was aware that unpleasant consequences might result from such an

attempt, and that in a street-row justice sometimes miscarries. He returned, therefore, to the centre of the Piazza, close to the statue of Ferdinand I., picked up the bundle, and then advanced towards the spot where the man had deposited his portion of the spoil. A greater mystification than he had experienced before, here awaited him.

The moon darting forth from the clouds behind which she had been concealed, played upon the walls and windows of a building, in the spandrels of whose Tuscan arches swathed figures of infants stood out in relief. It was evidently a public edifice. Its iron-clamped gateway and grill, its lofty and barred windows, suggested to his mind it was a prison; but the idea was instantly dissipated, when he discovered a basket fixed upon a turnstile at the spot where the fugitive had halted; and deposited in the basket was a child, while overhead hung the handle of a bell to be rung by those presenting to the State the offspring of their love and their shame!

The building was the Orfanotrofio, the Spedale degl' Innocenti.



CHAPTER III.

A DELICATE EMBARRASSMENT.

“**W**ELL! here *is* an adventure with a vengeance,” exclaimed the Colonel, with a laugh, that rang along the silent street, and echoed against the walls of the Spedale degl’ Innocenti.

“So, so, this was the business of my runaway gentleman and lady; and your poor mamma, pretty miss,” he added, addressing the foundling, “came to see the last of you, did she? Why, what a brute am I that I should have interrupted the tender parting of a devoted parent from her helpless child. Ah! Madam, you should have been braver, and have fared better.”

The subject had so far presented itself to the English officer’s mind as a jest; but the contemplation of the infant suggested more serious

thoughts. What was to be done? Had the unnatural parent but rung the bell, he would have been spared all speculation. The turnstile would have revolved, the basket been carried within the walls, and the world would never have known of the child's existence, until as a soldier, or a sister of charity, the nameless orphan had been sent forth to do the will of the Government.

But the bell had not been rung, and out of that omission the incidents of the following history were shaped.

The situation was embarrassing. No doubt there was something ludicrous in a middle-aged gentleman suddenly attempting to perform the office of a nurse! The hero of the adventure thought of this and appeared to hesitate.

"But what's to be done?" he questioned himself again. "Shall I ring the bell? If I do, the act of consigning this helpless child to an early prison and a life-long servitude, is mine.

"Confound it—no! that would be absolute inhumanity. Why should the innocent suffer for those who committed the sin?

"But shall I leave the poor thing here,—leave it to the tender mercies of the next passer-by, who

will probably ring the bell for me, and end the business? Well, that would be *his* act, and not mine."

The last word was only half pronounced—the speaker feeling ashamed of himself for allowing the idea time to rise from his heart to his lips!

A voice from the basket turned the current of his thoughts, and fixed the destiny of its inmate. In the pale splendour of the moonbeams he bent over the temporary cradle, and beheld a lovely little girl, a child passing out of infancy and helplessness, to that endearing age when it first learns to shape words of affectionate entreaty.

"Me, me, me—up!" she cried, kicking her little legs about, and laughing at the moonlight shining full in her face.

"Up!" answered the Colonel. "Yes! my little lady, you shall get up," and he lifted her forth from the basket and folded her to his breast.

There may be gallantry felt and exhibited even under such circumstances as these. It is certain the child's sex appealed at once to the manly heart of her patron. Has it not been said that he was "romantic?" and was not the

romance of this situation enough to touch any one with a grain of sentiment in his constitution? Ah, yes!—but this was no romantic weakness at which strong men would laugh.

The sweet poetry of his existence now began to flood back upon his thoughts. He recalled the image of his deceased wife, the only woman whom he had ever loved; he remembered the tender guardianship she, by her pure and Christian living, had spread round his life, and the guide, consoler, and example she had always been to him in every difficulty of trial or vexation.

It seemed to him as if her spirit were moving in the still air, as if she were floating on the moon-beams and kissing his forehead in the cool breeze wafted from the water. In the audible silence of the night he thought he could almost hear her whispering suggestively,—

“I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me. Lord, when saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? When saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?”

“And *the King* shall answer and say, ‘Inas-

much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.' ”

“And I will do it unto thee, my poor little helpless one,” said the English officer, as he tenderly stroked the small head, and carefully laid it on his shoulder.

“Me, me, me, mamma’s Mabel, poor mamma’s Mabel,” lisped the child. “Poor mamma,” she added, as if she had made up her mind to be as chatty and communicative as it was possible for her to be.

“Poor mamma, indeed,” he murmured, “your mamma’s a brute, my darling! of that there can be no doubt.”

But beyond the assurance that she was “mamma’s Mabel,” the Colonel could learn nothing from his little friend. In fact her vocabulary extended no further. He had already enjoyed the beginning and the end of her eloquence.

His determination to protect the child, and if it were possible to discover her parents, being resolved upon, Colonel Massey began to reflect upon the condition of his newly acquired charge, and on the appearance of the persons in whose custody she had last been seen.

The man reminded him of some one he had met before.

“I could swear,” he muttered to himself, “I have seen the fellow since I arrived in Italy, but for my life I cannot think where. But I *have* seen him I am certain. I never forget a face,—his is one I should know if I met him at the antipodes. He is uncommonly like —— no, that can’t be. This man spoke Italian; he would have answered in French had he been able,—perhaps in English, if he could have spoken the language. He *must* be Italian.”

Thereupon the Colonel commenced an examination of the girl’s apparel, and, much to his surprise, observed that they were of a superior quality—obviously the garments of a well-born child, and betokened parents of independent circumstances.

On looking into the bundle which the woman had dropped, he found that it contained linen and articles of dress; and he particularly observed that round the child’s neck was tied a Latin cross, made of silver, and engraved “MABEL.”

“Mabel!” he repeated, “why ‘mamma’s

Mabel,' the poor little thing said, and that's her name, of course."

Having noted these facts, the somewhat puzzled Englishman carried his burthen to his hotel, where, on her arrival, her appearance created as much amusement as astonishment.

But he was indifferent to remarks. He surrendered his own room to the foundling, and retired to rest on the sofa in his boy's chamber.

Early on the following morning Colonel Massey sent for his letters, and found the announcement of the *Launcester Guardian* confirmed in all particulars.

His correspondence informed him that the family lawyers, Messrs Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg, of Lincoln's Inn, had sent off a note to India, urging his immediate return to England, and informing him that meanwhile they had taken possession of Durham-Massey in his name.

"It is unnecessary to point out to you, dear Colonel," wrote his friend, the Hon. Cecilia Lawson, "how important it is that you should not lose an hour in hastening home. I thank Heaven that

accidental circumstances have already brought you so far on your way."

It was plain enough there was not a moment to be lost; so the Colonel, with his son and the little Mabel, proceeded to breakfast with Mr Tempest, to whom the previous evening's strange incidents were related.

The diplomatist was more a man of the world than his friend. While he laughed at the narration, he could not help suggesting that the child might prove a great encumbrance.

"What can you do with her, my dear Massey? you cannot take her with you. It will be far better to give her over to the police, and put them in possession of the facts of the case."

"Give her to the police! Just look at her, Geoffrey, and tell me whether you would have the heart to trust such a darling as that to police care. No! I shall do nothing of the kind. She shall go with me. I have no time to make inquiries—that duty I shall venture to leave to your kindness. If you discover her parents—well and good. If not—remember the poor man's ewe lamb.

"It grew up together with him and with his

children, it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.'

"So shall this child grow up as a daughter to me. God has very unexpectedly given me riches that I neither anticipated nor deserved, and has found for me one object at least for their profitable disposal."

"But, my dear fellow! are you serious? In a matter of such mere chance—"

"Chance! Tempest! There's no such thing as chance. Not a sparrow falls unknown. I believe in destiny,—'fate,' people call it."

"Synonymous terms, are they not?"

"They may be, but I do not feel that they are! To my ears the one sounds a heavenly, the other an earthly, term. That child was as much destined to be saved and protected by me as I believe it to be the maxim of our religion to be a 'Father to the fatherless.'"

The diplomatist was silenced. He bent his head in order to signify his respectful attention to whatever his friend might say further.

"No, Tempest," the other continued, "there's no 'chance' in this world! For some wise

purpose this foundling has been given to my protection. You may make what inquiries you like, but I have a presentiment we shall never find her father. If so, 'she shall be unto me as a daughter.'"

Prophetic words! Could those two men have lifted the veil of futurity and have foreknown the influence which that child was to exercise over persons connected with both, would they not have instantly acknowledged that men's lives *are* destined; and with the first glimpse behind the veil, would they not have dropped the folds in fear and trembling?

It is a merciful ordination that none of us can look into the future!

Mr Tempest made no further attempt to dissuade his friend from taking little Mabel with him. The "fatalist" (as he afterwards called Massey) had unconsciously succeeded in producing upon his mind an impression that at any previous period he would have denounced as a weakness; but which at that particular time assumed the character of religious awe.

Mr Tempest had not been used to such men as Willoughby Massey. They had not been fami-

liarly known to him in parliamentary or diplomatic life. Had he been a stranger, the other would probably have regarded him with distrust. But he knew that in word and in act the soldier was thoroughly in earnest, and would strictly act according to the resolution he had taken. So, the corner in his mind that might have been occupied with doubt was filled with respectful admiration. He acknowledged to himself that he had as much need to honour the man as he had loved the boy.

It was with this feeling deeply impressed upon him that he and his friend parted. They had parted twenty years ago as boys. They had met after that lapse of time for a single day. Now they parted once again and for ever. But that day had done its work. The earnest and the simple had left his mark upon the strong man's mind, as all genuine and unostentatious goodness will ever do, purifying the moral atmosphere in which the busy and the burdened live.

"The spirit," as Mr Maurice truthfully reads the passage—"the spirit bloweth where it listeth."

Geoffrey Tempest had heard the sound there-

of. His communion with the companion of his boyhood thoroughly imbued him with the conviction of a high destiny being involved in all the "chances" of existence. Massey had done his work and made him a better man during the brief tenure of life that remained to him.

That evening the Colonel, accompanied by his two juvenile charges, set out for England.





CHAPTER IV.

WARFDDALE TOWER.



IR NIGEL BLOUNT TEMPEST of Warfdale Tower, in Lancashire, and of Farningham Castle in the West Riding of Yorkshire, was the representative of one of the oldest houses in the north country.

A branch of the Despencer family, one among the famous names upon the Roll of Battle, settled in Yorkshire, having received grants of land from the Conqueror. In the reign of Edward III., John the heir of Geoffrey Despencer dying in his childhood, the property divided between his sisters Maud and Eleanor, who became co-heiresses.

Maud Despencer married Talbot Tempest, who had distinguished himself, along with many

of the English nobility in Scotland, under the command of Baliol.

Talbot was himself possessed of extensive lands, but by his marriage with Maud Despencer an amount of property was brought into the Tempest family which placed its successive representatives among the wealthiest commoners of the North.

Sir Nigel, the possessor of Warfdale at the commencement of this narrative, was one of that select body of English county gentlemen whom the late Emperor of Russia was pleased to say he regarded with envy. It is something to know that an autocrat does envy us, and in this instance we are instructed as well as flattered.

Given a man of old family, living on his ancestral property, occupying himself with old English sports, fond of farming and of breeding stock, particularly horses of as good pedigree as their master; possessed of ten thousand pounds per annum, or "upwards;" relieved of the pressure attending him who wears a crown or a coronet coupled with immense estates; and yet able to hold a position socially as respectable and as in-

fluent as a noble. Such a man excited imperial envy. Such was Sir Nigel.

His income was affected by the word "upwards."

It was nearer twenty than ten thousand a year, and was what is called "improving." That is to say, beds of coal having been found under one portion of it, the black diamonds had for a series of years been adding considerably to the value of the estate. Happily the coal mines do not intrude upon the Warfdale property. They are miles away in Yorkshire, completely out of sight, but never out of mind.

Warfdale Tower stands in a valley carved out of the slopes of the Yorkshire hills. The family residence itself, a great portion of the park and chase, and all the arable land, are in the adjoining county; but the river Warfe rises in "the backbone of England." Tumbling and foaming among the rocks which impede its flow, it makes its way through the larger part of the estate lying within the boundaries of Yorkshire, wild and mountainous and picturesque, purple with heather in the autumn, with stretches of splendid moor abounding with grouse.

In feudal times a border tower guarded Warfdale, adjoining which was a "cell" attached to Bolton Abbey. The tower still stands. After the Reformation, the Tempests had made this place their residence, but the family archives mention that it was destroyed by fire early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Another domicile was built by Sir Marmion Tempest, a few years subsequently, which continues to be tenanted to the present day by the owners of the estate.

Though the name "Warfdale Tower" is still preserved, the tower is in the grounds, removed some little distance from the hall, which is quadrangular, and one of the finest specimens in the North of England of those picturesque houses (so few of which, alas! now remain) constructed of beams of oak, the spaces between the huge framework being filled in with plaster, which, white-washed, contrasts beautifully with the dark wood-work on which it depends.

The vale of the Warfe is one of those old English nooks which Turner at the particular date of this story delighted to portray in his water-colour sketches. There are several draw-

ings by him delineating picturesque portions of the neighbourhood.

The mountain-stream, the Warfe, is a tributary of the Laune, which flows into the Irish Sea. Brawling among the Yorkshire moors, it at last reaches a narrow valley, overhung on either side by crags, that often lift themselves perpendicularly out of the river's bed, and among their crevices give resting-place to the ferns which there grow luxuriantly. For some two or three miles the Warfe flows between these steeps, rolling over huge boulders that seem in some primæval age to have been precipitated from the surrounding heights.

Then it forms small basins with recesses sheltered by overhanging foliage, the special admiration of Sir Nigel. To these delightful retreats he invited his choice friends to kill the trout.

Beyond this, the rocks rise precipitously out of the bed of the river, as if they had plotted to cut off its retreat.

But the Warfe is not to be out-generaled.

It has cut its way through the ranks of the

enemy in a narrow sluice known as the "Leap," some twenty feet deep, in the bottom of which it foams defiance, and with a hollow, cavernous roar dashes madly onward, impatiently spreading itself out, beyond, in a large expanse, fringed by a mossy sward. The valley gradually widens, and the oak forest sweeping over inviting slopes casts its green shade upon the self-congratulating stream, that sparkles as if with sentient joy in having escaped from the turmoil and opposition of the gorge above.

At this spot the first view is caught of Warfdale Tower. About a mile beyond, the vale of the Warfe expands into a park, slanting down on either side to the river, calmly and complacently gliding amidst luxuriant vegetation. Clumps of ancient oaks are scattered about; and banks of chestnut line the valley's sides, where they begin to get steeper and rise to join their encompassing hills.

Backed by one of these chestnut woods stands Warfdale Tower, looking from its entrance across the Warfe, and towards the moors which in picturesque outline enclose the prospect; while on the north, its windows face towards the

gorge, and catch a peep of one of its precipitous cliffs. On the south it commands the panorama of the winding vale as it stretches away for miles, exhibiting glistening turns in the tortuous river, sloping woods, and ever-varying lofty hills, here patched with emerald-coloured fields, there checked with sepia-like squares that the plough has made, and high over all clothed with the purple garments whose glorious hues the pencil of Linnell can alone describe.

In the middle-distance the prospect terminates with an orbed mound, as it appears, on the top of which, in the dimness of the perspective, the eye detects the grey battlements of the Keep, and the curling smoke of the town that has grown up about the protecting towers of the Castle of Launcester.

Such is the situation of Warfdale Tower. The house itself would be best conceived by a reference to Nash's views of English residences. It has been stated that it is quadrangular. It is also moated, and the moat is crossed by a stone bridge leading to a large gateway, with a wicket in one half of the gate. This is of stone, built into the wood-work of the house, and, like the bridge, ex-

hibits the fantastic taste of the age of the first Stuart.

In the centre of the arch are the arms of Tempest with the quarterings of Despencer; and a label,—“Godfrey Tempest: hoc fecit A. D. 1603.” It was erected to commemorate the visit of King James, who slept at Warfdale two nights, on his way to London, at the period of his succession, and the current stories in the family state that the royal condescension cost the said Godfrey so dearly, that he expressed his determination to burn his house down if the King ever came that way again. The house, however, had been built by his father, as the lettering carved on the face of some of the oak bracing-ribs shows, exhibiting the initials, “M. T., A. D. 1559.”

The architectural details of Warfdale Tower are “debased Tudor,” which, though impure when compared with the domestic structures of the time of Richard III. and Henry VII., retain their general features, and are infinitely to be preferred to the style which grew and flourished during the time of James I.

On passing under the entrance arch, a Tudor doorway, right and left, leads into a cloister-pas-

sage running round the four sides of the building, and meeting at the opposite side another gateway and portal leading out, across the moat, to the stabling and to the woods at the rear of the house. This passage looks into the quadrangle, and is lighted by a succession of windows, each in three compartments, filled with diamond-shaped glazing in leaded frames, and decorated with a quantity of armorial bearings and initials in stained glass.

The apartments and offices open with a series of doors out of these passages, and are all lighted from the outside, where they overlook the moat, with the exception of the great hall, which, occupying the whole of one angle, attains the entire height of the house, and has a deeply bayed oriel window projecting into the quadrangle, looking out upon two immense yew-trees, which fill the square, and tower above the surrounding buildings. Their lace-like boughs here and there brush the panes of glass of the upper corridor, which, like the one on the ground floor, also runs round the four sides of the house, and gives admission to the bed-rooms, whose doorways, in a rank, range down its inner side.

Warfdale Manor has no doubt a marked solemnity of aspect, and, it is unnecessary to state, is one of those places whose appearance points it out as the favoured retreat of a family ghost.

For three hundred years this house has been the home and the pride of the Tempests. None have been prouder of it than Sir Nigel. Under his care and taste everything has been restored, and the hall, the corridors, the rooms, entirely filled with antique furniture. In the Georgian era, when any taste seemed unknown in England, except bad taste, the dame of the then baronet had been enamoured of the oyster-shell Gothic outrages of the Honourable Horatio Walpole. That fashionable antiquarian of the last century had once visited the Tempests in London, and Lady Margaret had persuaded her yielding spouse to "improve" that "dull, gloomy hole" in the North.

Much of the ancient furniture had been banished to the outbuildings and scattered among the cottages of the tenantry. Its place was occupied by cane-bottomed seats, chinese-like chairs, gilded sofas; and the private dining-room which adjoined the hall (enriched with an elaborate ceiling covered with heraldic achievements) had been metamor-

phosed into a chamber after the fashion of the toy-shop at Strawberry Hill, the walls being cut away to admit Walpolean windows, and the glorious old oak wainscoting painted with white and gold and blue, and decorated with Watteau-like pastoral scenes, that gave it the appearance of a house of fans.

Lady Tempest contemplated cutting down the yew-trees in the quadrangle, which she said "looked as if they were waiting for a funeral."

And so they were, for death cut off her weak, yielding husband, and before the long minority of her infant son had terminated, the dame herself and her friend Mr Walpole had been "removed."

The yew-trees escaped, and when Sir Nigel came into possession, the follies of his grandfather were quickly corrected. Walpole's windows were pitched out of window. The wainscot was thoroughly cleaned, the Georgian furniture and Chinese monsters were sent to market for what they would fetch, and the ancestral high-backed chairs, the presses with their elaborately carved panels and doors, the antique Venetian velvet covers and hangings, with the tapestry and quaint old silver sconces, took up their former dignified positions.

The "dull, gloomy hole" became once again a perfect picture (which may it long remain!) of an English manorial residence of the time of Queen Elizabeth.

There was a favourite room in the old house, in which the master of the mansion was almost certain of being found, when known to be at home. It was a well-proportioned chamber of oak-wainscot dark with age, with a richly carved chimney-piece that occupied nearly one side of the room, displaying armorial quarterings of the principal families with whom the Tempests had intermarried, while inside the capacious fire-place was a lining of glazed tiles repeating their several cognizances in wonderful variety.

The flooring was parqueted very curiously, and so highly polished, that except in the centre, where the thick Turkey carpet spread its dim magnificence, it was as unsafe as ice for inexperienced feet. The ceiling was fantastically groined with projecting bosses here and there, on which the coat-armour of the heroic owners of Warfdale appeared in gilding and colours that were fading into obscurity; and in the carved panels were portraits, full-lengths and ovals, exe-

cuted by limners of high reputation, of the husbands and wives of the race who had flourished most conspicuously at Court during the Tudor and Stuart dynasties,—Holbeins, Mores, Jansens, and Vandykes, in heavy oak frames, only a degree darker than some of the canvasses they contained.

In one place there was a row of carved shelves full of books, in old vellum and calf bindings, of almost inestimable value,—rare editions of our earliest English printers, typographical treasures from the presses of Caxton and Wynkyn de Worde, printed books as rare as MSS., including, as special favourites, the first folio edition of Shakespeare, Lord Berners' translation of Froissart, and the quaint treatise on hunting and hawking by Dame Juliana Barnes.

The room seemed to be part library, part armoury, with a large mixture of modern sport. In the corners were figures in armour of various periods; against one rested a salmon rod, another was made to hold a landing net, a third had a creel round his neck, suspended by its leathern strap, and a fourth carried upon his steel basenet a wide-awake, encircled by artificial flies.

On an ebony cabinet was a glass case con-

taining a stuffed otter with a trout in its mouth, and at the top of an ancient chest was another, enclosing a stuffed fox and cubs. An enormous pike stood in the centre of one of the shelves, and a hawk descending on a covey of partridges showed to equal advantage on the ledge of an old marqueterie cupboard.

A table was covered with fishing tackle and a variety of odds and ends made use of in its manufacture, while upon one of the high-backed chairs was an open gun-case, displaying one of Manton's famous double-barrel guns.

Sir Nigel was seated near this table, in one of the bay windows of Warfdale Tower, dressing flies. The trout had been rising briskly in the Warfe during the morning, and the Baronet was preparing himself for the enjoyment of a little sport before sundown. The butler entered the room with the letters and laid them on a tray beside his master.

Correspondence always excited in the master of the mansion a shudder and a growl. He wrote a bold Roman hand, but had the greatest possible objection to exhibit it. In fact, he hated letters, partly because they were commonly begging

petitions for all sorts of things from all sorts of people, who, "knowing the kindness and generosity of his heart," as they invariably said, did their very best to petrify it with their epistolary mendicancy; partly because to write kept him at home, and, being a devoted sportsman, he hated to be confined to the house during the day.

The post delivery before him on this occasion excited his particular annoyance, for it was more numerous than usual; and as one communication after the other was opened and flung upon the floor, the butler's ears were greeted with the expressions, "The old story, a sick wife and threatening tradesmen;" "No, no, it won't do; my Christian principles won't induce me."

Presently his tone and manner changed completely.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, "this is Miss Lawson's writing; what can she have to ask for, I wonder?"

Whereupon he broke the seal, and read as follows,—

"My kind and dear friend,

"Dr Clifford has just arrived from Italy.

He is the bearer of sad intelligence, which he has begged me to communicate to you ; and it is the most grievous task I ever undertook. Your brother, Mr Geoffrey, was suddenly seized at Florence with fever on the 2nd ultimo, and freely bled the following day ; but as the malady increased, he was again bled on the 6th. There was a consultation of physicians on the 8th, who resolved to take more blood, which seemed to arrest the progress of the fever. Unhappily—”

“ Murderers ! ”

The word was literally screamed by Sir Nigel. He rose, or rather shot up from his seat, brushing back his white hair from his brow, and fixing a wild stare upon the butler, as if transfixed by some horrible sight.

For a considerable period he remained motionless ; then turning to the table, took up the fly he had been constructing, and smoothing the feathers with his little finger, bent over the artificial snare as though to look at it were the most serious occurrence of his life. One solitary tear dropped upon the wing and drabbled it. It was the only one Sir Nigel shed for his lost brother Geoffrey,—and that was the last fly his nimble fingers ever made.

That falling tear seemed to waken him out of a dream ; and the old man was busy in an instant with thought for others.

“Dear Augusta,” he said, raising the letter again to his eyes, “this will indeed be a blank in your life,” and then he finished the epistle.

—“Unhappily the following day Mr Geoffrey’s strength was evidently failing, and he became conscious of approaching death. Dr Clifford says your dear brother declared his religious convictions very composedly, and he has nothing but a peaceful death to describe. Mr Geoffrey sent his love and blessing to his surviving kindred, and committed his wife and children to your protection. This seemed to him great comfort. He repeatedly said, ‘Sir Nigel will love them as he loved me ;’ ‘He will love them,’ and so on, until his mind began to wander ; in which state he was engaged in repeating the Lord’s prayer, and the last words he articulated were, ‘Deliver them from evil.’

“It has cost me a great effort, Sir Nigel, to write this letter, but I have regarded it as a sacred duty, and am certain you will know, without my intruding my unavailing sympathy, that I

shall feel with and for you, and for Mr Geoffrey's widow and children.

“I am your faithful servant,

“CECILIA LAWSON.”

The Baronet's eye glanced through the casement, wandered over the valley, and rested at length upon the distant towers of Launcester.

“There!” he thought, “there! Augusta unconsciously awaits her fate. Ah! her elder child is now my heir!”

As the thought of the brother who had been his pride, and for whose comfort he had so long laboured to cultivate the estate to the highest perfection, crossed his mind, Sir Nigel's tall, firm-set frame trembled with emotion.

No wife, no child had been his. In earlier days the only love he ever knew had been blighted by death. He loved, and the object of his devotion had died. She died resting on his arm, fading away from existence hour by hour, her last look fixed on his face, and her last words were, “I shall never leave you.” From that moment he had never loved any other being but his brother.

Death was a thing in which he seemed to have

no belief. He had parted with his dearest friend on earth, but he felt that she was still near him and with him. This feeling cheered his life.

He was never desponding or melancholy. On the contrary, the country round could produce no more cheerful friend and host. He entered into every one's pleasures and enjoyments. He delighted in a true sportsman; and his commanding figure, with every muscle developed from exercise, never seemed to feel fatigue as he roamed over the moors, or "fenced" the stiffest country a horseman would wish to meet.

He would come home from a long day's hunting, and still, even when years stole upon him, appeared the freshest and the youngest in buoyancy of spirit at his own table. He delighted in well-told anecdotes and sparkling wit; and his laugh would ring along the corridors of Warfdale, the true metal of delight.

Nevertheless, dignity of manner stamped all he said or did, and communicated its influence to every one who approached him.

His younger brother was a child when he had reached manhood, and upon this child he lavished his affection. Geoffrey became to him a

sacred trust, and his "brotherhood" the object most dear to him in life. He had trained him for official duties, delighted in his success; and his marriage seemed to fulfil the hope that the "old place" should preserve its line of masters.

Now death had once more assailed him. Years ago the destroyer had taken from him his early but unforgotten love; now it had snatched away his dear brother.

"And his eldest boy is my heir," he repeated and repeated, as though a structure he had been building for long years had been blown down, and all the work was to be begun again.

With a groan of grief, that sounded strangely in Warfdale, Sir Nigel ordered the horses to be put to his carriage; and in a few minutes was on the high road to Launcester, crouching back in a corner of the vehicle, and wondering how he should tell his widowed sister of her husband's death and her children of their orphanage.





CHAPTER V.

THE DOWER HOUSE.



LANCASTER is one of the most picturesque towns in England. The lake mountains and Yorkshire hills sweeping southward, and gradually diminishing as they advance, are guarded towards the sea-board by a solitary hill, whose base is washed by the waters of the river Laune. On its crest—a strong position for fortifications, and recognized as such ever since the time when it was a “Castra” of the Romans—stands an ancient castle: Picts and Scots, Anglo-Saxons, Normans, the House of Lancaster, the Tudors, and finally the troops of the Pretender, have in successive ages occupied this historic hill. Roman remains have frequently been found, and walls that boast their Roman origin still stand.

Launcester is famous for its Castle Gateway and its Keep.

The Keep, which occupies the centre of the building, was erected by King John. It presents the same general appearance as the Norman Keeps at Norwich and Newcastle on Tyne; the same massive walls, full fourteen feet in thickness, and the same splayed windows, with the plainest "lights." Unlike its sister Keeps, it is poor in detail; and what few enrichments or decorations it once possessed, the utilitarian stone-mason of the last century destroyed to the best of his ability.

Nevertheless, in their solid grandeur, the walls and chambers survive the changes of six hundred years; and when the stranger stands within them he can re-people those stern-looking reception-rooms of King John, and imagine the scene presented there, when, surrounded by his barons and soldiers, the monarch received the submission of Alexander King of Scotland.

The castle gateway belonging to a later century was erected by John O'Gaunt, and is now the most perfect and most noble of its kind in England. The gate, deeply recessed, and protected by its

portcullis, is flanked right and left by projecting octagonal turrets rising some seventy feet in height, their walls pierced with those strange-looking loop-holes that served the bowmen of former days, and their summits crowned with machicolated battlements through which iron, fire, and molten lead could be poured down on any aggressive foe.

Here that mother of heroes, Philippa of Hainault, may have listened to the verses of the man who consolidated the English language, (and whose friendship was the pride of her royal spouse),—Geoffrey Chaucer; and here came that prototype of special correspondents, the chronicler who has left us so many life-like pictures of the chivalry of the English and continental courts—Froissart.

There are few panoramas in England more striking than that which courts the eye viewed from the parapets of the towers of Launcester. To the north the horizon is clothed with the mountains of the English lakes. The heads of Skiddaw, of Helvellyn, of the Saddleback, and Borrowdale fells, are seen, “heaven-kissing

hills," while beneath green pastures glide down to the margin of a bay, which singularly resembles that of Naples.

On the east, the moors and pikes of Yorkshire as they descend and slope towards the sea are everywhere indented with valleys, enriched by woods and dotted with parks and mansions. In the midst, winds Launesdale; the snake-like Laune, fed by the Warfe and many a mountain rill, coursing through it, and (at its bends) forming successive "cloughs," whose steep banks display the luxuriance of English landscape scenery.

As the Laune approaches nearer the town to which it gives its name, it is interspersed with islands where the cattle ruminate, and the angler seeks the well-protected salmon. Flowing by the walls and quays that were for centuries busy with the hum of a sea-faring trade before Liverpool was known, the towers of the castle overhang the hurrying current, which here meets the tide, and widening as it flows, falls, at a short distance off, into the sea.

Everything the eye can covet is presented in this view. Mountain, ocean, river, woods, islands, the picturesque outline of an ancient town climb-

ing up an isolated hill, whose crest is circled with frowning battlements, and with the aspiring tower of its antique church,—these combine to make a perfect picture, and to recommend the country around Launcester to the favour and admiration of the lover of nature.

The town still preserves in its nomenclature the remembrances of ancient days. It has its Gates, St Agnes' Gate, Dean's Gate, and St Leonard Gate. It rejoices in a Nun's Alley and a Vicar's Walk. Its church adjoining the castle's walls is one of those "perpendicular" edifices, with lengthened nave, deep chancel, and long-drawn aisles, which contrast strongly with the dwarfed style of the present day.

Sir Nigel was proud of contemplating the castle and church of Launcester, and contrasting them with the feeble imitations or tasteless edifices of the 17th and 18th centuries. They had been objects of intense interest to him since his earliest years, when, as a boy, he received his education in the adjoining school founded by Edward VI.

The Dower House of the Tempests stands on the steep of the hill hard by the church; and as

the Baronet was hurrying along the road from Warfdale to Launcester, at many a turn of Launsdale Valley the distant towers were visible, and he knew the roof of the house to which he was wending his way lay beneath their shadow. The manorial residence of the Tempests is situate some twelve miles from Launcester; but they have also for many generations kept up a civic residence in the county-town. This has sometimes been a Dower House; has sometimes been occupied by the chief in person; and sometimes granted to a younger brother for his habitation on his marriage. It had been so tenanted by Geoffrey Despencer Tempest, who, as before stated, was many years younger than Sir Nigel, and by whom he had been brought up more like a son than a brother. When Geoffrey married, Sir Nigel gave him possession of this house for his life.

Sir Nigel's carriage dashed through the streets of Launcester, up the Castle-Hill, and stopped at Geoffrey Tempest's house. Little did its inmates suspect the horror and gloom which within another hour was to cloud that happy home.

As there was nothing unusual in a visit from Sir Nigel, on the present occasion it created no surprise. He paused in the hall to kiss his nephews and to inquire after their health, having sent a message to apprize his sister-in-law of his arrival. This place was merely the entrance passage with a stair-case at the end, but it was wide and lofty. It was lighted by a sky-light in a kind of dome in the centre, but possessed no furniture except a bench, an umbrella stand, a lamp in the centre, and a barometer against the wall; it therefore was particularly adapted for such juvenile sports as were obliged to be played in-doors. This accounted for the rocking-horse which held a prominent position in the space under the dome. On the diamond-shaped black and white pavement two boys of about ten years of age were whipping a top with the engrossing earnestness usually characteristic of children at that age when engaged in a favourite pastime.

They were dressed alike, in jackets, trousers, and broad fall-down collars, and looked very much alike at the first glance; but when Sir Nigel went up hurriedly to the elder, caressed him with more than his usual tenderness, and

addressed him with much more than his customary affectionate solicitude, there was a difference clearly perceptible between the glowing delight expressed in the face of the one so distinguished and the gloomy mortified look of the other, who at once drew aside as if to escape observation.

Young as he was, Geoffrey Tempest had already begun to feel the humiliation of being a younger son. On the present occasion his uncle, of whom he had learnt to stand in no slight degree of awe, had a cause for being more demonstrative towards his brother than he had ever been before; of this however the former was ignorant. He only knew that his uncle went to Blount first, as everybody did, and made much of him, and did not seem to think that he, Geoffrey, was entitled to any notice at all. Therefore it was, that half sullen, half shy, the offended younger brother drew off into the darkest part of the hall.

The entrance of another person did not improve either his temper or his position. Yet the new comer was a lady, who had always been kind to him, and though unquestionably

she had passed her *première jeunesse*, her features wore a freshness of feeling which plainly proved that her heart was still young. She was dressed with that studied simplicity which betrays the greatest amount of refinement, the most noticeable part of her toilette being a dove-coloured silk gown, and a shawl and bonnet equally quiet in colour.

Sir Nigel looked up on hearing the rustle of her gown as she approached. In a moment his hat was off with the ready courtesy that distinguished him, and an exclamation of pleasure escaped his lips as he hastened to take her extended hand. Without a word she threw her arms round the boy over whom his uncle had the moment before been bending, and Geoffrey had the mortification of witnessing another display of affectionate regard bestowed on his elder brother, while he was, as he fancied, overlooked.

“Oh, Miss Lawson,” exclaimed the Baronet, “you see I have lost no time.”

“You never lose time, Sir Nigel, when any good work is to be done,” replied the lady, smiling through the tears which then filled her eyes. “But where is Geoffrey?”

She looked about searchingly, and at last spied him in a corner, affecting to be engrossed with his whipping-top.

“Come here, sir,” she called to him. “Come and shake hands with the best friend you have in the world.”

The young gentleman was evidently not in an amicable disposition. He looked sternly at the toy he kept turning round and round.

“Come here, my boy!” cried his uncle in his kindest voice.

Geoffrey obeyed with alacrity, the shadow passing slowly from off his face. He now received the greetings that had only been delayed, and both his friends gave them with a heartiness he had never before experienced.

They presently walked away (talking in an under-tone), in the direction of Mrs Tempest’s sitting-room, and left the boys to return to their interrupted play, prudently deferring for the present any intimation to them of their grievous loss.

While the two friends are thus communing and taking counsel together for the better performance of their charitable errand, the reader

had better be made acquainted with the one least known to him. The Hon. Cecilia Lawson was the sister of a general officer who had been killed in action while assisting in one of the great Peninsular triumphs. Her family and the Tempests had been very intimate, and Miss Lawson had been on the most friendly footing both at Warfdale Tower and at the Dower House. There was only one other family in the county with whom she had been as closely connected, and this was the Masseys of Durham-Massey. By those who knew her best she was regarded as a woman of superior intelligence as well as of exceedingly active benevolence. For years she had been consulted by these dear friends in affairs of difficulty, and been accepted by them as a consoler in every domestic affliction they had endured.

There could be nothing therefore surprising in Miss Lawson being associated with Sir Nigel in this visit of condolence to the widow of his brother.

The boys looked after the two retreating figures, the tall form of the Baronet bending to his companion to hear more distinctly a confi-

dential communication she was making to him in a low soft voice, as she gazed into his now thoughtful, melancholy face. They looked for a time silently, with the impression that there was something going on they did not clearly understand.

"What made Miss Lawson cry when she first caught hold of you?" demanded the younger, when their visitors had disappeared round the stair-case.

"I don't know," replied the other, looking unusually grave.

"And uncle, I'm sure I saw tears in his eyes when he threw his arms round you as soon as he came in?"

"I don't know, Geoffrey," said Blount, with a gravity of demeanour that contrasted strongly with the hilarious earnestness with which a few minutes before he had been pursuing his sport.

"I don't think they cried over me, either of them," added the first, sullenly.

"Miss Lawson did," observed the other. "I saw the tears on her cheek when she kissed you."

"Oh, I dare say she hadn't done crying for

you. You know you're such a precious favourite!"

The elder brother made no answer, though the sentence just uttered was expressed with a good deal of bitterness.

"She never comes but what she hugs you and hangs over you, and talks and laughs with you nearly all the time she is in the house."

Blount remained grave and abstracted.

"Then my uncle, too,—you're a favourite there. He always talks to you the most, and gives his present to you first, whenever he visits us or we visit him."

"Mamma has told you before, Geoffrey," now said Blount calmly, "that as I am the elder, my being first noticed by friends or relations, ought to be no cause of complaint to you."

"Oh, of course not, I'm nobody and you're everybody. And yet mamma acknowledged that there was scarcely half an hour's difference in our ages. It doesn't seem to me fair that in consequence I should be regarded as so much your inferior. I don't think *you* would like it if you were in my place and I in yours."

Again the elder brother remained silent.

"But what do they want coming here," demanded the other with increasing asperity, "looking like mourners in a funeral procession?"

"I don't know," repeated Blount, for he began to experience an apprehension of evil.

"Oh, you never know anything," replied Geoffrey, mingling impatience with contempt. "There's something in the wind, you may rest assured. Uncle, who is always so cheerful, wouldn't look so solemn for nothing. Perhaps the Tower has been burnt down."

"I don't think it can be that. Uncle is rich enough to build up another house in its place, quite as grand, I dare say; but I begin to believe with you," he added, lowering his voice, "that some misfortune has happened. I am afraid—"

Here a servant came to the boys, summoning them to their mamma's room. Blount did not give expression to his fears, whatever they were; but proceeded at once, with a troubled countenance, to ascend the stairs. Geoffrey threw aside his top, and followed, his face denoting not only irritation but uneasiness.

Both entered the apartment. It was their mother's ordinary sitting-room, furnished with a mingling of modern luxuries and time-honoured comforts, the elegant and the solid. Handsome ottomans in gay chintzes of the latest French manufacture stood by the side of tall cane-backed chairs that must have been retained in the Dower House since the reign of the first James.

The first object that met their gaze was a delicate fragile figure in a morning wrapper, only a little more colourless than the face that rested against the back of the great invalid chair, in which, almost as long as they could remember, their mother had sat when able to see her children or her visitors. Both were alarmed at its death-like pallor, and the rigid attitude in which they found her,—Sir Nigel on one side holding one of her hands with a look of profound commiseration, Miss Lawson on the other, bathing her temples.

There was another person in the room, a man of middle age, and of that saturnine complexion produced by continuous hard study and abstinence. He wore an ill-fitting suit of black,

the frock-coat descending nearly to his heels, but any one could discern at a glance that the wearer was careless of appearance, and had a distaste for the ordinary vanities of personal decoration.

The expression of his features was decidedly ascetic, but they were then illumined by spiritual enthusiasm to such a degree as to render them singularly striking. In one hand he held a small ivory crucifix with an exquisite carving of the dying Saviour, in the other was a breviary open, and from it he was reading a portion of one of the services, in a subdued yet thrilling voice :—

“Quando corpus morietur
Fac, ut animo donetur
Paradisi gloria.”

It was Dr Clifford, a Roman Catholic priest, who had called to pay his usual visit of spiritual consolation to a much-respected member of his flock, just before the arrival of Sir Nigel and Miss Lawson. He had therefore been present at the revelation they had come to make, and was striving to alleviate her sorrow with that sublime prospect which is the Christian's birth-right.

Blount gave a cry of alarm, and hurried towards his mother. Geoffrey hung back, apparently subdued by the spectacle. Sir Nigel held up his hand to impress on the children the necessity of silence and self-command, but the elder boy was already kneeling at his mother's feet, clasping her disengaged hand, and gazing with half-suppressed sobs and streaming eyes into her corpse-like face.

For a moment Mrs Tempest opened her eyes, fixed them affectionately on her eldest born, then looked appealingly at her brother-in-law. The Baronet instantly took the boy by the hand.

"I acknowledge my nephew as my heir," he said with a trembling voice. "And, with the blessing of God, will be as a father to him as long as I live."

"Amen!" said the priest reverently, as he still read from his breviary.

Blount did not know what this recognition meant, his mind was subdued with a great dread; he trembled and would have fallen, but for the strong affectionate arm of Miss Lawson that had encircled his waist. Geoffrey still stood aloof. Frightened though he was by the dreadful sig-

nificance of the scene, he was painfully conscious of having again been overlooked, apparently of not being wanted.

The mother glanced uneasily round the room. She gazed on her younger son standing by himself, tearless, though alarmed. Impulsively he sprang forward as if determined to claim his share of her maternal solicitude. She smiled faintly, as the boy knelt on the other side of her chair, and seized her hand.

Presently the smile faded away. Dr Clifford on his knees commenced the last offices of his Church. Sir Nigel and Miss Lawson bowed their heads. Blount continued to sob. Geoffrey grasped tighter the hand that was slipping from his own, and grew paler as he observed the eyes glazing into unconsciousness that had a moment before looked at him so lovingly, and the smiling lips becoming blue and rigid in the ghastly aspect of death.

When the priest concluded the prayers, Sir Nigel took each of the boys and led them silently out of the room. They had become orphans in the fullest sense of the word, for the invalid whose life had long hung by a thread, the

tenuity of which was only known to herself, had not been able to sustain the shock of her husband's death.

Blount and Geoffrey Tempest went to live with their uncle at Warfdale Tower.





CHAPTER VI.

MAY DAY IN THE NORTH.



THE Royal Grammar School of Lancaster was a venerable building, with a venerable Head Master, having venerable forms and desks, and adjoined the yard of the venerable church. Its windows looked out into the churchyard, giving the scholars the full benefit of seeing the funerals which every afternoon reached that God's acre; and affording Dr Breman a dismal opportunity of pointing a moral to dull or idle boys as regards the value of time, and working while it was day.

Familiarity bred contempt; the daily habit of seeing mourners led the young gentlemen to speculate upon the different shades of grief by which they might be affected. They gave very little credit for sincerity to the greater number

of them, whom they narrowly scrutinized at these grim ceremonials.

In front of the school and in this churchyard grew a large sycamore tree, producing an abundant supply of cock-chafers, which were caught and kept in fly cages, in order that out of school hours they might be made to spin for the diversion and relaxation of the scholastic mind of Launcester.

This churchyard was the one breathing ground into which the boys were turned out when a form came down or when school hours were over. They learned their lessons often in summer time lying upon the tombstones; and one of the most popular gymnastic exercises was to slide down the iron rod which served as a handrail to the long flight of steps by which the churchyard was reached up the castle-hill, on approaching from the town side.

By taking a run in the yard, and then agilely leaning upon the rod, a boy might slide from top to bottom of this flight of steps, shooting down the line with tremendous velocity. Grave divines, men in lawn-sleeves, the Head of a college, High Sheriffs, and county magistrates, on visit-

ing Launcester, have been known to look at that iron rail, and wish they were as nimble as in those days when

“The sports of children satisfied the child.”

One of the scholars, after having made a bungling descent, on running up the steps into the churchyard to prepare for another essay, observed a school-fellow sitting cross-legged upon a tombstone, watching the sails of the ships which, standing-in from sea, were entering the mouth of the Laune.

“Why, Willoughby,” he exclaimed, “what’s the matter? Has the doctor given you an imposition? you look as solemn as if you were going there!” pointing to a corner under the castle walls where executions take place: a dismal corner, marked out by the blocks of stone let into the pavement into which is fixed the machinery of death, when “forth from the opening ranks” “a waggon comes laden with posts and with planks!”

“No! Blount,” answered the other lad, “nothing’s the matter. I was only thinking.”

“Thinking! a penny for your thoughts!”

“They would not be worth a penny to you,”

answered Willoughby Massey, "for I was thinking about some one you don't know!"

"I'll bet you a twopenny tart at Sally Brown's tuck shop, I know what you were thinking of!"

"Done, Raspberry," said young Massey.

"You'll give me two guesses?"

"No! only one, and you must guess before I can say two twos."

"Girl for ever!" cried Blount Tempest.

"Girl!" echoed his school-fellow, "who told you?"

It needed no telling, for in his hand he held a letter, evidently written by a female, and the other naturally concluded that he was thinking of the writer. The two boys were—the eldest son of the late minister at Florence, and the heir of his friend the proprietor of Durham-Massey. As neighbours, they had first become known to each other, as school-fellows they were almost inseparable.

"I was thinking about my sister Mabel," young Massey went on to say. "We had scarcely been separated until I came here to school: and she went to live at Hampton Court with Miss Lawson."

“I remember them both as well as I remember anything,” said Blount; “nice little thing Mabel—everybody liked her; and as for Miss Lawson, I have scarcely a pleasant recollection in which she does not figure, like a guardian angel, or fairy god-mother, or good genius, or something of that sort.

“And so they are living together in the old palace of Cardinal Wolsey?” he added inquiringly.

“Yes, and Mabel gives me a long description of the place; there seem such a jolly lot of intricate passages in it, leading to out-of-the-way nooks, where different sets of people live as cosy as rabbits in a warren, but apparently not quite so sociable.”

“I thought that only kings and queens and their attendants lived in such palaces.”

“So did I, Blount; but this is evidently a royal palace without royalty; kings and queens, and princes and princesses too, have turned their backs upon it; but the precious great place has found humbler tenants, I dare say very glad to find such highly respectable lodgings, especially as I’m told they get ’em for nothing.”

“Convenient that, I should say, to small incomes and uncommonly genteel tastes. At any rate, I hope your sister is happy there, Willoughby?”

“Well, I don’t quite think she is, Blount. To be sure, she writes a lot about the pictures, and the gardens, and the river, but only, as far as I can see, to let me know how much better she likes similar attractions at Durham-Massey.”

“Good little thing! no doubt the people she meets at this ram-shackle old palace are strangers, and she misses the affection of your father and yourself. The Colonel, I know, is very fond of her.”

“Everybody is fond of her, and we all try to make her as happy as possible. By George, don’t I miss her bright face?”

“Well, it’s no use fretting, old fellow, so put up your letter and let’s have a game at cricket.”

The school-fellows went away with their arms flung over each other’s shoulders, and presently were at the wickets displaying a tremendous amount of energy. Both were excellent bats as well as expert round bowlers, indeed they excelled in the game, and were sure to contribute largely to the score when victory was achieved.

Geoffrey Tempest, though at the same school, was not so friendly with Willoughby Massey. He was not popular with his school-fellows, in consequence of his moody, discontented spirit; which frequently betrayed itself when he observed the superiority of his brother, and the favour shown him by the boys.

In Launcester school, holidays or particular festivals or anniversaries were guarded with almost religious respect. Royal-Oak-Day was a whole holiday. On the 29th of January the boys always went to church, and so escaped Dr Beman's matutinal ferule. Charles I. was popular on that account, and a sort of scholastic gratitude was felt for Oliver Cromwell (notwithstanding his usurpation) for having delivered the school from one day's "martyrdom." But among all the holidays there was none enjoyed more than May-day. May-day had no political associations, and it was observed with the most jubilant demonstrations in the country about Launcester.

Your Southerner or Londoner knows little or nothing of English sports as they were kept in "the good old times."

It is only those who have been born and bred in the North who can remember how such a day as the 1st of May used to be celebrated. "Used!" Even in the North such old customs are fast dying out, and in a few years the land will know them no more.

Old English customs and sports have a particular hold upon our affections. We like them for themselves, and love them for their associations. The iron-age is beating out many quaint old habits over whose decay we may sincerely mourn.

Why should Lady Godiva no longer ride into Coventry, and country chaw-bacons miss being annually taught the moral upon curiosity, learnt from Peeping Tom? A few years back some "fast men" turned the venerable show into an orgie, and the usage is therefore to be sacrificed to a particular abuse. No one especially loves Archbishop Laud in the Star Chamber; but he seems a thoroughly hearty gentleman when he gets among English sports.

" We, the latest seed of Time,
New men, that in the flying of a wheel
Cry down the past"—

in Lady Godiva and many other kindred celebra-

tions and English customs, that were not only surrounded with happy associations, but had in them beneficial effects. Lady Godiva "clothed o'er with chastity" reminded us year by year of the wrongs of oppressive taxation; and contrasted with the hardness of the tyrant, the blessedness of sympathy between the rich and noble and the poor and lowly.

A May-pole and a Morris-dance are things that have long ceased to be familiar to the eyes of the citizens of London. Time was, when a royal "Column of May" stood where the church of St Mary-le-Strand now stands.

"Amid the area wide they took their stand
When the tall May-pole once o'erlook'd the Strand:
But now (so Anne and Piety ordain)
A church collects the saints of Drury Lane."

Sir Nigel Tempest was not the man to allow such an old English holiday as May-day to pass unobserved. He had a noble "Column of May" upon the village green of Thornby,—a gift to the villagers, being one of the finest American pines out of the park, one hundred feet high.

Year after year on the eve of the 1st of May

young Massey came over to Warfdale to join in the sports. May morn was ushered in by the pealing of Thornby bells, and by a song to the rising sun which the villagers sang on the church tower at the annual celebration, as the choristers still do at Magdalen College.

Tennyson has described May-day as the maddest merriest day of all the glad new year. It certainly was so at Thornby. All the young girls and boys had their May-gads, or peeled willow-wands, dressed with ribbons and flowers. Their hats, caps, and button-holes were ornamented with the beautiful hawthorn blossom. The young people headed the procession, as it wound its way from the village green to the Hall. Behind the May-gads came little girls, who looked like animated flower-beds, so decked were they, their hair, their dresses, and their baskets, with flowers.

The blossoms were strewn in the path of the May Queen who followed. The Queen of the May was always chosen for her beauty; and Thornby flattered itself that it could boast as many "witches" as could be found in the valleys and villages for which our North country is famous.

The Queen always rode. Her Majesty was the only mounted person in the cavalcade. A favourite old mare of Sir Nigel's acted as charger on these festive celebrations; and rarely has Royal palfrey carried a more lovely burthen than has been seen upon the back of Sir Nigel's pet "Smut."

The May Queen was invariably dressed in white, crowned with a chaplet of cowslips, blue-bells, hawthorn flowers, and ferns. Diamond head-dresses and lace lappets at a birthday drawing-room never could approach in loveliness the head-gear of majesty at a Thornby show.

She was surrounded by maids of honour, who danced about and around her during the whole time the procession was in movement, twirling in the air hoops of willow bound with flowers; so that the Queen literally rode in the midst of a garden of roses.

Behind her came the Rush-cart. A long hay-cart (drawn by a picked team of horses, their bridles decked with flowers, and streamers flowing from their winkers) was hidden beneath a superstructure of green rushes, built up some fourteen feet high. The decoration of this

equipage was grand in village splendour. The "Tempest Arms" had a levy laid upon it for the occasion. Every pewter pot in that establishment, with a superfine polish, served to form part of stars or letterings upon the side of the rush-cart. "May-day," "Heaven save the Tempests," "The May Queen," and other appropriate legends, surmounted by emblems and devices, adorned the sides of the cart, which glittered brilliantly in the sun's rays.

The rush-cart was not to be viewed or examined closely. Like David Cox's drawings it depended upon breadth of effect; and great breadth the pewter pots gave it. Seen from a distance, the wall of moving rushes seemed to be adorned with silver devices, and however much the description may be calculated to produce a smile upon the uninitiated, those who have once seen a May-day rush-cart will aver it was a very pretty piece of rustic *mise en scène*.

Behind the vehicle, and closing the procession, came the greatest delight of all, the Morris-dancers. Oh! Morris-dancers and "Peace-egggers," who that once has seen can ever forget your noble persons and your strange apparel?

Stand forth, dear Fools, and let the modern world be moved to admiration !

How the clown belabours the lads and lasses ! How that weapon swings about his head and falls with a smash and a rattle like a hail-storm on the face of some grinning ploughboy ! He carries his weapon like a Gog or Magog, and it somewhat resembles that staff with a chain and a spiked ball at the end which the giants display. The Morris-fool carries his staff, and at the end of it a cord attached to an inflated bladder with a handful of peas inside.

The bladder does great execution upon the faces of the bumpkins, and as it whacks them about the ears, the internal hail-storm rolls and rumbles, to the edification of the farmers' wenches.

The Fool is the Prologue, accompanied by a party of six "Morris-dancers," who enact a Mystery of the most chivalric character, that always was and will remain a mystery. The performance opens by the dancers taking their places as if for a quadrille. To the music of triangles, fifes, and drums, they move off upon a wild career, in a figure that seems to have been borrowed by the "Lancers,"—that dizzy figure in which the

whole company appear to be suddenly intoxicated, and to go winding and twirling and reeling in and out, as though lost in a Rosamond's bower, and dodging to and fro in search of their partners.

The Morris-dancers as they quicken their pace become strangely excited; they flourish their arms, and Maid Marian brandishes in mid air a shining ladle, while the *corps dramatique* slap their hands and their knees with the fervour of an Indian devotee.

The dance having wound up both performers and spectators to a pitch of enthusiasm, thus the "mystery" commences. There is a valiant knight and a desperado of fiercest aspect: there is a Royal personage and a venerable individual, who whether he be father of the maid or "Father" in an unsocial and ecclesiastical sense has never been clearly revealed. The mystery has something to do with Robin Hood, Cœur de Lion, Friar Tuck, and Little John. A valiant knight on occasion declares

"I ham the Knight, who fought in harms of steel;
St George it is my name!"

It has been mentioned that the procession, whose component parts have been described, pro-

ceeded from the village to the Hall, but not before the May-pole had been "raised." Now, as the May-pole was a fixture, it is necessary to explain that by "raising" is meant—decoration. There was a crown to be placed upon its top: it had to be wound round with ribbons: ropes of flowers had to be fastened to it, and to be stretched out and pegged into the ground in a circle forming a floral tent, beneath which popular games were played.

Then the procession moved forward to the Hall, where a party of ladies annually received the villagers, and welcomed the May Queen. Her Majesty alighted at the Jacobian gateway and partook of egg-flip and other Royal drinks; which (after being tasted by the Queen) circulated among the company. There were donkey races, hurdle races, quoits, and cricket; so that Warfdale park assumed the aspect of a country fair, and looked particularly gay as the Rushcart and the Morris-dancers and the flower girls moved about, to the delectation of old and young.

At last it was proposed that there should be a game at "hare and hounds,"—a game with which every English school-boy is perfectly familiar.

Willoughby Massey was selected to be hare. Fastening a leathern strap round his waist, with his flannel jacket buttoned tight over his chest up to the throat, he looked as much as to say "Catch me who can."

"Put plenty of paper into the bag, if you please," he said, "for I intend to give them a long chase, and you won't soon see me again!"

"Well, you have four hours clear before dinner," cried Sir Nigel, "and if that is not enough to tire even *your* legs, I shall conclude you are a living example of perpetual motion."

"Dear Mabel!" said Willoughby to his friend, "I wish she were here to-day, Blount. She should dance with Sir Nigel. What fun we would have. Suppose we make her name our field cry? It will sound pretty among the woods of Warfdale."

"Now then, are you ready?" he presently demanded. "Five minutes' law, mind you! Up the valley, on to Warfe moors, then down again towards the Warfe, and home. That's the line of country. If you lose the scent, you will shout 'Mabel,' and I shall answer. Good-bye, Sir Nigel, I'm off."

All watched him, bounding like a deer over the grass, and under the old oaks, along the upland of the Park, until he passed out of sight.

“You will have to run hard, my boy,” said Sir Nigel, “to catch Willoughby to-day. What fine condition he is in. The five minutes are up. Away!”

And away they ran. Such a set of hounds were never seen, for not only did the lads of the village start with their ribbons in their coats and flowers and hawthorn in their hats; but even the valiant knight and the Royal personage, and the villain of the Morris dancers, took to their heels, a most motley fantastic group, and hurried upon the track of the hare.





CHAPTER VII.

THE LEAP.

THE scent lay right up the hills, and before half an hour was over, the pack of hounds was considerably thinned. The stout parties lagged and the slimmer found their legs ache dreadfully.

Splendid exercise no doubt is running, and apparently a very simple undertaking; but it is anything rather than simple to the untrained, particularly in such a country as that about Thornby, where you may run for miles up-hill every inch of the way, and yet see the spreading hill-sides rising above you until you reach the summit of Ingleborough Topping. Had Daniel Lambert been trained upon those moors he would never have become the distinguished person into which he developed.

It was not until they got through the park, through the woods, through the pheasant covers, beyond the gorse lays, and well into the open upon the hills, that they even caught a glimpse of Willoughby.

“And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell like a falling star.”

It seemed as if the voice calling “Mabel” fell from the sky, as they heard his voice borne down by the breeze from the high slopes above, and watched him lightly springing over the heather, the heather green and lovely in the freshness of the spring.

“Mr Massey will lead us a pretty dance,” gasped the Morris Knight. “St George it is my name! but, by St George! I’d rather dance any number of Morris dances than be a hound over these Warfdale hills.”

The voice from afar continued in the most aggravating way to exasperate the hounds, until at last they reached the brow of a line of hills beyond which they had seen the figure of the hare disappear. The scent lay all right, but not a vestige of him could be detected.

There was nothing for it but to follow the line of paper, which led down a steep descent to the valley of the Warfe. In the woods they caught the cry "Mabel," and encouraged, pushed onward as bravely as they might amidst the brambles and oak saplings that scratched them fearfully. The valiant knight was here bereft of some of his finery, and the King left portions of his Royal robes as gifts to the "woods and forests."

It was evident that Willoughby had crossed the Warfe by springing from stone to stone in the shallow water, for the scent took the water's edge. They were forced to follow, with the agreeable feeling that they should have to cross again in order to return to the Hall. Some slipped in and got very wet, others stopped short and gave up the chase. There was no danger, but evidently the hounds meditated, and be-thought them if the hare ran down stream on the opposite bank there would be some tough jumping on nearing home in that picturesque portion of the Warfe, where the cabined stream dashed down between rocks which are easy

enough to leap, as to width, but not inviting when the dangers of a false step are taken into consideration.

The pack therefore became much smaller at the edge of the Warfe. The bold and agile alone crossed. There were not more than ten in number that found the scent on the opposite side, and made their way through the thick woods that clothe the sides of Warfdale proper.

In the distance, but faintly, they could hear the cry of "Mabel," and the paper on the ground showed clearly enough which way to follow. It led down stream, in the direction of the park; and all felt certain that Willoughby had made for the "Leap." It was just what he would do, because he could clear it with perfect ease, and be able to laugh at those from the opposite side who dared not follow.

As it has been already described, the distance from the Leap to the Hall is only about a mile, and Willoughby could easily watch the hounds follow on his scent, and yet make to cover at the Hall, uncaught. Blount Tempest determined, if he had made for the Leap, and particularly if he were found watching on the op-

posite side to see how the hounds would follow, that he would be the first to dash across the dangerous chasm, and at least give him a stiff run home.

The valiant knight, who was one of Sir Nigel's hinds, and knew every inch of the estate, seemed to anticipate what Willoughby would do, and strove hard to reach the Leap first. The scent all lay in that direction; the hounds ran with increased eagerness, and broke out from the brushwoods on to the rocky and mossy shelves that intervene between the forest and the bed of the river. Had the Warfe been swollen they could not have approached the Leap. As it was, the greater part of the bed of the stream was dry, and the gorge at the Leap was quite enough to carry off all the water, that roared and foamed through its narrow jaws. Down to the edge of the Leap the scent lay, and confirmed their supposition.

Most of the pursuers by this time had been left some distance behind, and were scrambling as well as they could through the forest. On emerging upon the Leap the leaders were disappointed not to catch sight of Willoughby.

There could be no doubt which way he had gone; so his friend, young Tempest, concluded that he must have made haste to reach the Hall, and was waiting there for the return of his pursuers.

“Steady, Robert, steady,” said Blount to the valiant knight, “it’s slippery work over this half-dried moss!”

“Summut soapy, maister,” the man replied. “Maister Massey’s safe on t’other side, and I’s welly nigh sure ’ll be dauncing at t’Hall wi’ one o’ the lasses there afore thee r’le get nigh ’um.”

Not waiting to make any answer, and nettled with Robert’s remark, the youth made a dash at the Leap, and over he went. Robert followed instantly. It seemed nothing to him; but Blount felt exceedingly glad when he found himself safe, despite a tumble; for on landing, his feet went straight away from under him, and like a boy on a slide, in the most degraded attitude he glided down a shelf of rock, to the immense amusement of his companion.

The former was a good deal surprised to find

Willoughby's bag lying at the spot where his slide came to an end.

"Well, Robert, here's the bag at any rate. Mr Massey intends to poke his fun at us with this."

They picked up the bag, and in a short time reached the Hall, where the company were in expectation of their return. There stood the Rush-cart. The Queen of the May and the flower-girls were dancing. Sir Nigel was pacing the terrace overhanging the moat, and his friends were looking on at the dance.

The Baronet first caught sight of his nephew approaching, carrying the hare bag in his hands.

"Hollo," he cried, "are you the hare now? Where was Willoughby caught then?"

"Caught!" Blount replied, "we never caught him. "He distanced us all, took to the river, and crossed it again at the Leap! Has he not come in?"

No! no one had seen him.

"Oh! I dare say he's gone up to his own room," suggested one of the ladies, a visitor at

Warfdale Tower; "perhaps he came in by the garden entrance, and intends to change his clothes at once for dinner. He must have been very hot."

"I will go and look for him," volunteered a motherly dame, "and, my boy, you had better come along with me before you get chilled. Why, Blount, how hot you are! The perspiration is standing on your cheeks like dew-drops."

It was so.

"Where was Willoughby caught?"

As Sir Nigel spoke these words Blount happened to be looking at Dr Clifford, and observed his face turn deadly pale. The Doctor did not utter a word. His anxiety was instantly disguised; but as Blount entered the house he followed, and overtook him.

"Don't you trouble, madam, to ascend to Willoughby's room," he said, addressing Mrs Fitzgerald. "I and Blount will go. The stairs would fatigue you. Pray let us ascend by ourselves."

"Oh! very well, Doctor. You are extremely polite," the old lady replied; "but mind, Blount,

that you change your clothes directly. I am so fearful of your catching cold."

Unsuspectingly she turned, and passed out again to the May revels.

The instant she was gone Dr Clifford's hand fell heavily upon Blount Tempest's arm, clutching it, and giving the youth acute pain.

"Was that bag near the edge of the Leap, Blount?"

"Yes, Doctor. I found it there."

"Where? How?"

"Where! Why a few yards from the Leap."

"A few yards? Oh! thank God."

"When I and Robert jumped the Leap I am ashamed to say my legs went from under me; I slid down the shelf and the bag pulled me up. But why do you ask, Doctor?"

"Oh, Blount, Blount," he replied with passionate grief. "Quick, quick, for God's sake, call Robert, and let us go to the Leap."

To the Leap they went. On the road they met none of the pursuers. Finding, as they imagined, which way the hare and his two

followers had gone, they had turned back, and retracing their steps up the bed of the river, had recrossed at a shallow spot, where there were stepping-stones for the use of the herdsmen and labourers.

Nearly three-quarters of an hour had elapsed since the Leap had been left, and Blount Tempest hurried back to it as fast as Dr Clifford could possibly move; but a mile's distance gave the former ample time to reflect. He began to think that the Doctor might be right in his suspicion. Willoughby might have missed his footing. If he did he must have fallen into the rushing water in the depth of the Leap, and have been instantly carried into the pool. In the pool he would be safe, for he could swim.

"To be sure he could swim," he said to himself, "and, after all, how foolish I was not to go and look for him in his room before we left the Hall. If he got a ducking, he would naturally not like us to see him, because we should laugh at the pickle he must be in."

So Blount comforted himself, and tried to make up his mind that there was no danger, that the Doctor was mistaken, and that Wil-

loughby would have a rare joke at the old gentleman's expense when they got back home.

The boy was crying peace where there was no peace.

The Doctor and he were of different minds, the former anticipating evil, the latter beguiling himself into the belief that there was no cause for apprehension.

They reached the Leap at last. Blount in his anxiety trembled as he stood upon the ledge of rock, and looked down into the narrow gut where the Warfe was boiling and foaming at the obstacles to its current. He tried to gain confidence from the recollection that he had within the hour leapt in safety from side to side of that chasm, and asked why should not so expert and agile a youth as his school-fellow have done the same?

He, the Doctor, and Robert stood side by side, gazing into the depth, as if they expected to see Willoughby there. There was not a trace of him!

"Stay ye there, reverent sir," said Robert. "Let's tak a look at t'other side. She be a slithering wench be th'Warf in ganging w'hom."

And across the Leap he went. What good looking at the gorge from the other side could do, no one but the countryman had a notion ; for he walked up the ledges and bank until he came to the bits of paper which the hare had scattered. Having found them, he turned round upon the river, and measuring with his eye the line which he thought would be the course Willoughby Massey would take, walked straight back to the gorge, approaching it some three yards below the spot where the others stood.

Having reached the ledge, the man on hands and knees began carefully to examine the surface of the rock. This manœuvre again puzzled his associates. His meaning however was soon revealed.

“Ere be a slither, Maister Blount,” cried he, with his finger upon the rock, pointing out a spot where the wet moss had broken under some one’s foot, and a dark clay line was marked by the slipping of the flat of a boot’s sole.

“May’bees Maister Massey cum this way.”

If he did, however, there was no evidence of his having been precipitated into the gorge.

“We must go down to the pool,” said Dr Clifford; “if anything has happened, he would be carried there.”

Then they all scrambled along the rocks to the pool. Hope made Blount’s heart leap on reaching the spot where the river emerged from between the rocks and spread into the broad basin. Still there was not a trace of him to be seen. Nevertheless, the Doctor seemed dissatisfied, and ordered Blount to be silent when the latter tried to reassure him and tempt him to believe that Willoughby had gone home.

“We must examine the pool carefully, Robert,” observed the Doctor. “Let us walk round it first.”

At its mouth the “lasher” dashed into the basin, and the stream, which seemed to dive into the depths of the pool, rose again a few yards out, and bubbled up with strong emotion. Then quietly it mingled with the peaceful waters, and its rage vanished.

Dr Clifford walked forward, and reached the opposite side of the pool in advance of his companions. While they were looking about the

lasher for some trace of the missing youth, they were startled by a piercing cry.

Both turned to look at the Doctor, and beheld him standing by a broken bank, his arms stretched out over the water, and his whole frame motionless, as if he had been suddenly turned to stone.

There Willoughby Massey lay floating, and looking so calm upon the water, that it might have been his bed, and he asleep. On his temple a small spot of blood told the sad story of his fate. He had missed his footing, slipped, and fallen headlong into the gorge of the Warfe. In falling, some point of rock must have struck his temple and rendered him insensible. In that state the river had carried him away, and swept him over the lashers into the pool.

There had been no struggle, no fight with the angry waters. They had sported with him as they pleased. They had hurried him away; flung him into the spreading basin; toyed with him for a while; and then calmly floated the lifeless form to the bank beneath which they found it, sleeping in its watery grave, without

a trace of pain. No clenched hand, no distorted features, no cramped limbs betokened dying agony. He lay so pale and calm and beautiful upon the fatal element, that a water lily could not have breasted it with a more gentle grace.





CHAPTER VIII.

A MEMORABLE FIRST MEETING.



DR CLIFFORD would not leave the corpse, but despatched Blount Tempest to the Hall to make known what had occurred, and to arrange for its being removed.

As the youth approached the moat a scene less in accordance with his own melancholy thoughts could scarcely have been imagined. Peals of laughter followed the antics of the clown. Groups were scattered about the lawns. Here the Morris-dancers, there the May Queen and the flower-girls; in another spot, the truly English game of bowls (in which Sir Nigel joined) was being played. His nephew approached him, and with faltering accents and haggard looks communicated the terrible intelli-

gence. Within a few moments it had passed from mouth to mouth, and a painful silence fell upon the collected multitude. All stood aghast, afraid to speak or move.

Never, perhaps, was a more mournful scene witnessed in a garden, except on that day when the remains of the Duchess of Orleans were committed to the tomb at Weybridge; and Ary Scheffer caught his death-cold, as he stood upon the lawn, when the offices for the dead were celebrated over that coffin of the brave and noble-hearted woman. Scheffer came with loving hands to help in bearing her to her resting-place; and when they had resigned to a grave among flowers the lady whose life had been past amidst thorns, he went home, and died.

It was a very bright sunny day; but the news Blount Tempest brought from the Leap chilled every one. Before a storm bursts forth in eastern latitudes there comes a cold wind, raising clouds of dust, and giving unmistakable warning of the impending hurricane. The air that was scarce endurable with heat, suddenly turns chilly and makes the flesh creep; and then a stillness falls upon the scene; not a leaf

moves, not a bird flutters in the air. An oppressive silence, a leaden calm prevenes the clouds rising on the horizon.

So silence and stillness fell upon that jubilant band of villagers at Warfdale Hall. The chill had come, then the silence, and then the desolation with clouds and thick darkness rose from the banks of the Warfe.

Presently Sir Nigel was seen approaching, marshalling four sturdy yeomen the way to the Hall. They carried between them something stretched out upon a plank and covered with a white sheet. It was a strange group. Motley mixed up with death. There was the valiant knight, still clad in his Morris finery; and the other men displaying flowers and ribbons fastened to their clothes. But no one seemed conscious of this. The faces of all were grave and downcast, sadly out of keeping with their holiday attire.

The solemn procession approached the Hall. Children clung to their mothers' skirts, and hid their faces in the folds. The farmer boys and villagers simultaneously doffed their felt caps, and the young girls herded together in groups, sobbing

pitifully, and shrinkingly making way for the burden borne by those four men. It was the first time that most of those young people had been confronted with death, and they were awed. But to the school-fellow of the dead youth surrounding objects seemed to swim before his eyes as he watched and waited the approach of the bearers.

“Can this,” he thought, “be all that is left of my dear friend and favourite play-fellow! Dear Willoughby lies there silent and motionless. He can speak no more. I cannot persuade myself that he is dead. He sleeps, he will wake, I think. Dead, dead and drowned, while I was so near, heated in a game—a game played with him—this I cannot realize.”

The groan that rose like one voice from the assembly as the four men passed into the Hall smote his heart, and taught him that was truth which he could not school himself to look upon as true.

They laid the corpse in the Gustin-chamber, not in Willoughby's own small bed-room.

“Let him have all the honour that the Tempests can pay him, Blount,” said Sir Nigel to his nephew. “He comes of an old stock, and

he is the last—the last of his race. In him the Masseys end.”

“What a blow for his father!” remarked the affectionate boy.

“His father! with all my soul I pity him!”

During that long solemn week, when every one crept noiselessly about the Hall, and the slightest sound startled the ear, as it reverberated along the corridors of Warfdale, Blount Tempest used constantly to visit the Guestin-chamber.

Day after day passed wearily. The officers of death came and went, made every preparation, but never moved the corpse.

At last one evening Sir Nigel murmured, “We must postpone it no longer.”

“It! what is it, uncle?” demanded the inconsolable friend of the deceased. “You would not have the funeral before his father comes, surely?”

“No, Blount, that is not what I mean. You know, my boy, we have not yet laid Willoughby in his coffin: and that is *it*. We must do so, Blount, to-morrow, and take a last farewell of our friend.”

“Oh! uncle,”—but his utterance was choked;

he could say no more. At last his boy's heart realized the truth : and he sobbed convulsively. Sir Nigel pitied him ; who could help sympathizing with a boy's first great grief in life ? Perhaps the old man felt that his kinsman's grief was like something he had himself once suffered, for he led Blount out into the garden, and with all the tenderness of his nature tried to comfort him. But the school-fellow and playmate was not to be comforted. It may be but dust we dote on when 'tis human life we love : but it is when we have to part from that dust that we first experience the awfulness of death.

The hour had come, then, when Blount Tempest must part from the first friend of his young existence. He now remembered that if the dead was to be shut out from his eyes, so would he be hidden from the eyes of his doting father, who must be on his road to Warfdale Tower, to which he had been summoned from a distant part of the kingdom. Blount resolved to pass the night in the chamber of death, and pray beside what remained of his friend. He could then tell him for the last time how much he had loved him.

He determined to cut off three locks of his

sunny brown hair, and keep them, one for his friend's father, one for his sister, one for himself; and after watching by him until the morning, he would take a last gaze upon his handsome face, and impress its dear image upon his memory for ever!

Unquestionably Blount loved him; with a boy's full heart dearly loved him, and cried bitterly when he thought that those who loved him still better would see his face no more.

The household had retired to bed, and the last foot-fall had died away. Blount Tempest passed from his room, unlocked the door, and stood again beside the bed whereon Willoughby's remains lay waiting for burial. The tapers were dimly burning at each side of the antique bed-head; that bed on which a king had slept. He knelt by the corpse, and laid a hand on his. In that attitude he said his prayers, and then in a thrilling whisper thus addressed him:

“Good-bye, dearest Willoughby; to-morrow, best, kindest of friends, I shall see you no more! They will never see you! but I will tell them everything.”

He then rose and cut off the locks of hair.

“I will tell them how you loved them, and how your sister’s name was the last word you uttered.”

“Mabel, Mabel!” he repeated with passionate emphasis. “Oh, Mabel, why are you not here?”

He buried his head in the clothes at the bedside, and sobbed aloud, for there was no need to check his grief. The silence of the room seemed, as it were, audible; and through the silence there came not music, not sounds distinct, but a singing in the air, that reverberated through his brain, like the remote song of the waves children fancy they hear in shells.

As he raised his head to listen, his eyes fell upon a face that seemed unearthly. In the dim light he thought at first it was the spirit of his dead friend come down to comfort him, the expression and the features appeared so like his. What was it? Who was it? The door was locked. If a human being, how could the chamber have been entered? If not,—but no! he rejected the thought of any supernatural visitation. While yet staring in wild astonishment at the form before him, it moved round the bed and came to his

side. The boy was still on his knees crouched before the presence that seemed to him angelic. "Mabel is here," it said.

It was Willoughby's sister!

She knelt down by his side: she too clasped the hand of the dead, and pressed his cold lips to hers. Then followed sobs and tears and groans mingled with ejaculations, which completely recalled Blount's senses. From being absorbed by his own thoughts, he turned his attention to his fair companion.

"He is dead, dead! cold and dead," she moaned. "Could no one save his dear life:—no one for his poor father's and his sister's sake?"

"Every one here would have saved him if it had been possible," his friend answered.

"Every one?"

"Yes, every one, for we all loved him very dearly!"

The eyes of Mabel brightened, and she looked her associate straight in the face.

"And you are—?"

"Blount Tempest," he whispered.

They spoke no more. The recognition was enough. She stretched out her thin hand, placing

it in his, and a soft pressure told her thanks! The next moment everything but her dead brother was forgotten. She flung herself upon the bed and clasped him to her heart, called him by his name, and prayed him, in her anguish and desolation, not to leave them.


Vain, vain was that cry of heart-wrung agony. He heard not her loving voice. He could not answer its thrilling appeal!





CHAPTER IX.

LIFE'S ROMANCE.

“AD's love and stick fires are soon out,” is one of a class of stereotyped sayings commonly applied to a youth's affection. Has not the falsehood of the proverb been proved in thousands upon thousands of instances; and have we not just as bright and beautiful evidences of the permanency and loyalty of early love as of the same qualities when the passion is developed at a more advanced age?

Are we to place confidence in the tenderness of a steady middle-aged gentleman, “who looks before he leaps,” and not rely on that of the young soldier who goes to distant lands to serve his country, and to earn a competence for himself that will enable him to return and wed the girl he leaves behind him?

Surely there is truth in young affection, beauty in early love ; something holy and manly in what romance usually too lightly regards as “sentiment.” Let the reader adopt this profession of faith, for it will assist materially in understanding the hero and heroine of this story.

Before Willoughby Massey was committed to the grave, his sister had made so profound an impression on the thoughts and feelings of Blount Tempest, as to give an entirely new impulse to his nature. Part of this was probably due to the impressionable state in which the sudden loss of his warm-hearted friend had left him, much, no doubt, to the fact of both possessing and sharing a common sorrow ; but more to the exceeding attractiveness of the young lady with whom, under such trying circumstances, the sensitive youth became so tenderly connected. Out of their association with the dead arose a new life to the living.

Sufficient excuse for any extravagance of youthful devotion might have been found in the charming face and graceful figure of Mabel at this period. Although quite a girl, she was tall and womanly in appearance. Indeed, every one apparently regarded her as a woman. She com-

manded respect from all, by her reserved and reticent manner.

Not a look or action ever betrayed a suspicion that she valued herself for her beauty. There was a total absence of all vanity. But she was proud. Mabel's demeanour made her male acquaintances comprehend that there must be no approach towards familiarity.

Such women seem to say, and yet say it with perfect courtesy,

"You and I can be friends. We have objects of interest in common. We can converse pleasantly and profitably on topics that are agreeable to both. We may ride together to-day in the park. We may sit next one another at dinner to-night. At a later hour, we may be charmed while enjoying together the same Opera. We may visit together the same galleries, and may see a great deal of one another by cultivating the same tastes—but! that must be the beginning and the end of our intimacy."

Mabel's conduct made Blount quickly apprehend the footing on which his acquaintance could alone be tolerated. She was evidently prepared to be friendly, and (when she talked of her brother)

became almost affectionate. With tears in her eyes she spoke of the pleasure it gave her to think that "her dear Willoughby had found such kind friends, had been so much beloved by Sir Nigel, and had met with so affectionate a friend as his favourite school-fellow."

"In his letters home he constantly spoke of you," she said.

These words made the youth's heart beat quickly, and he wondered whether Willoughby's friend would have been welcomed by his sister. But not a syllable was uttered to show whether she would or would not have been glad to see him. He felt disappointed. Mabel, though but a few months the elder, seemed to be some years her lover's senior in feeling and in thought.

She spoke like a woman, and no doubt felt like one. She had then attained her full stature, and looked commandingly as she swept along, resembling the figures of angels seen in Flaxman's drawings, "trailing clouds of glory as they come."

The thin material of her dress falling in graceful folds about her lithe figure displayed its proportions to the greatest advantage.

The horrible fashions of a later date were

not then invented, which *disfigure* a woman, and mar the outline that nature has dictated and art accepted as the Beautiful.

Her head was small and classical. It might have been a model for the Venus de Milo. Her hair,

“Oh, golden hair, with which I used to play,”

was such as the poet has ascribed to Guinevere. Well may women pride themselves upon it, for nature has adorned them with no attraction more decorative.

Mabel's hair was of that golden hue rarely seen except in master-pieces of painting. Artists, particularly Pre-Raphaelite, seem to think that the poet sings of something dashed with red, or bright as fire. That which the upper ten of St James's call “auburn” passes also for “golden.” It is no such thing.

The light brown hair of a child naturally darkens as years advance. Rarely, very rarely, on some fair woman's head the child-time colour remains, but as she passes into womanhood the delicate brown becomes glistening, and as the light strikes upon the glossy tresses, a wave of gold seems to sweep over them, like the wave of sun-

shine which passes over the wheat as it bends before the summer breeze.

This golden hair was drawn smoothly and tightly off the face, and knotted in a coil, which, falling into the hollow of the neck, left the outline and configuration of her head sharp and clear.

Her brow was not Grecian. The brow and nose which the Grecian sculptors delighted to cut seldom realizes our ideal of beauty, because they appear to portray women of small intellectual power; and when intelligence is wanting, beauty is marred.

The brow of our heroine was not lofty (which in a woman's face gives an expression of boldness), but it was sufficiently so to convey a feeling of the possession of power, and was remarkably straight, until it curved outward over the eye-brow, whereby greater depth was given to the setting of the eye, and the organ of "ideality" was as strongly developed as the disciples of Spurzheim would desire it.

Eye-brows are often described as what is called "pencilled." Mabel's were not in this artificial state, but were much darker in shade than her hair. Indeed, the eye-brows seemed to shadow

her eyes, and to aid the overhanging forehead in deepening their tone and effect.

Blount had seen no colour like the eyes of his mistress, except that of the ocean, when a grey tone softens and subdues the bright blue of the waters as they appear at sunrise.

The sea, however tranquil in the bright morning, may be agitated by storms before noon. So may the calm eye. The long, fringing lashes that sweep over it not only increase the liquid expression, but when raised, can emit a flash that tell of the passionate lightning concealed within. No angry elements existed in Mabel's gentle nature; but her eyes flashed with agitation when she spoke of Willoughby.

Her nose was long, thin, and straight; its only deviation from the strictest regularity was to be found in the bridge (which was so finely modelled as to attract attention by its transparency), whereby the sameness of the Greek type was avoided, and character given to the face.

The small well-rounded cheek ended in a dimpled and somewhat saucily projecting chin.

Ever since Lord Byron's time the "breeding"

exhibited in hands and feet has been a favourite subject for comment. There are many in this liberal age who "smile at the claims of long descent," and think that education will make one person as refined and elegant as another; and that it matters not what ancestors we have, if we are properly and carefully trained.

Apart from all personal prepossessions in the matter, it is difficult to understand on what principle those who admit the results of breeding among inferior races of animals could doubt them in the highest race. Sometimes the ploughman's or mechanic's son may, through early training and by dint of his own quick perceptions and observation of the ways of society, become the polished and true gentleman; sometimes, too, the son born of gentle lineage, taught and trained with care, will turn out a rough, rude lout; but these are exceptions to the rule.

Refinement of habit, of life, of employment, and mode of living (embracing refinement in feeling as well as in thinking), having belonged to a man's ancestors from generation to generation, do produce in their offspring physical and mental

results, evinced in the grace, ease, and elegance of manner considered to be characteristics of high breeding.

If a small foot and small hand are regarded as evidences of gentle blood, still more trustworthy are small ears. When they are transparent like wafer china they have a singular charm, and this Mabel possessed in an eminent degree. Her golden hair brushed tightly back from off the face, left exposed to view a pair that Phidias might have wished to model.

She had adopted no barbaric habits. No slave-like hoops of metal pierced her flesh; no miserable imitation of the vanities of savage life hung pendent from those delicate lobes.

Such evidence of purity of taste was, however, most probably due to whoever had had the superintendence of her childhood, for the custom of making a hole through the tender cartilage to obtain a place for an additional feminine decoration is one for which very few who follow it are responsible. It is a sacrifice on the altar of vanity to which the girl is forced to submit at an early age. Mabel had not been called upon to go through this humiliation. Her education and

nurture had been conducted with unusual tenderness.

Of this there could be no doubt among those who knew who it was Colonel Massey had entrusted with the cultivation of her feminine virtues and accomplishments. The task had been confided to no "strong-minded woman," strong only in a factitious strength that gives no mental advantage to the possessor—petticoated Herculeases, who talk not merely with masculine independence, but affect a Brobdignagian muscularity of idea among the intellectual Lilliputians with whom their hard fate obliges them to associate. The instructress of Mabel was a *strong-hearted* woman—much the most reliable as a young lady's guide—and the development of the character of the pupil showed how judicious had been the selection of the teacher.

The reader has no doubt surmised that the charming sister of Blount's school-fellow held claim to that title by adoption only. She was the foundling discovered in the basket of the Orfanotrovio at Florence by the Indian officer on his return home, brought to England by him, carefully nursed at his ancestral home, and

year after year by her glad spirit and childish beauty throwing so much sunshine over his inheritance, that Durham-Massey without her seemed the gloomiest old mansion in all Lancashire.

The Colonel had been persuaded to part with her, when the strong-hearted woman, to whom she had been confided, had satisfied him that her charge should live for a few years entirely at her residence near the metropolis, that she might have the advantage of the best masters available for finishing her education.

This, however, was not arranged without certain stipulations, by which he could occasionally enjoy the society of his adopted daughter. The untimely death of his only son brought her unexpectedly back to Durham-Massey, where her presence did much towards reconciling its proprietor to that heavy affliction. Her affectionate solicitude, her untiring devotion to him in this great trial, rivetted the links which attached them so closely.

The Colonel began to regard her with the fondness due to a real, rather than with the kindness he had satisfied himself with showing to his adopted, daughter. She had long been treated as

such by the friends of the family, was styled Miss Massey by every one, and her accidental introduction having been completely lost sight of, it was not strange that Blount Tempest, among others, should have so readily accepted her for what she was styled. But his opportunities for cultivating a grand passion became more and more circumscribed as his uncle's plans for his education led him in one direction and Colonel Massey's plans for Mabel's benefit led her in another.

Geoffrey Tempest did not happen to be present at the May-day festival. Sir Nigel had thought proper, some time previously, to remove him from Launcester and send him to a distant school, having observed in him indications of jealousy towards his elder brother that rendered separation, he thought, a prudent course. He was, therefore, not a spectator of the mournful tragedy which made that May-day so memorable at Warfdale Tower. In the pursuit of a very prudent policy Sir Nigel had resolved to keep the brothers as much apart as possible until they were grown up, and their different callings in life necessitated that separation as a principle which

he felt it his duty to inaugurate. As they became adults, Geoffrey and Blount knew little of one another. They met, as boys from school meet, at holiday-time, very good friends for the first day or two, while home is fresh and their intercourse is fresh to themselves likewise: but presently familiarity breeds—if not contempt, at least contemptuous observations, niggling speeches, and ebullitions of temper that commonly and healthily end in a round with the fists. At the Midsummer holidays, after the death of Willoughby Massey, Geoffrey heard all the details of the fatal accident, and various spots associated with it were pointed out to him by his brother Blount. But this was all. Not a remark was ever made regarding Mabel that tended to arrest Geoffrey's attention. Blount had already learned by experience his brother's jealousy of temper and moodiness of disposition; they were a barrier to all confidences. As it often happens with brothers, so it happened with them: God had made them relations, but they chose their own friends. Blount's young love for Mabel was utterly unknown to and unsuspected by Geoffrey. In this way the two boys approached manhood. Meeting

only at their holidays, they were practically estranged; and even when they did meet, it was but a short time before Sir Nigel, and especially his old favourite domestics, had good reason to long for that happy day when school would recommence, and the brothers again be parted for another six months.

At length the time arrived when school-boy days drew to a close. Sir Nigel, the guardian of his nephews, sent his heir as a Gentleman Commoner to Magdalen College, Oxford; while Geoffrey proceeded to London, there to study the law, and to pursue that career which events will presently illustrate.





CHAPTER X.

EMINENT LAWYERS.



MESSRS Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg, of Lincoln's Inn, have long held a prominent position in the legal profession. Mr Herbert Probyn, the senior partner of the firm, may be said to have been the relict of the old-established house of Probyn and Probyn, and from father to son the business has been handed down to the present day. The late Timothy Probyn, who resolutely remained a partner long after he had ceased being able to share in the labours of the office, retired to the sunny "rus in urbe" contentment of Teddington, leaving his "boys" to look after matters in Elm Court. The boys were then respectively (for they were brothers) about 50 and 45 years of age.

Theirs indeed was a case of "lucus a non,"

for they never had been boys,—the elder at school was always known as “Old Probyn,” the younger was nick-named “Daddy.” Old Probyn, a man addicted to “generous port,” and a great parochial authority in the district where he resided, suddenly took leave of the world one morning without giving his brother or housekeeper the slightest warning. He was found dead in a large arm-chair in his bed-room, after having fared sumptuously over night with an ex-Lord Chancellor.

His business and all his worldly effects became the sole property of the remaining brother, Mr Herbert Probyn.

The churchyard of Teddington received the mortal remains of the defunct, who now sleeps with his fathers beneath a ponderous accumulation of stone-work, such as London citizens delight in, exhibiting four huge sides, with ample room for grandiloquent epitaphs, and crowned with a decoration which looks like a petrified *wine-cooler*. Such sepulchral ornamentation was, at any rate, appropriate to the habit in his life of Old Probyn.

When his brother had been decently interred,

Mr Herbert Probyn found himself unable, single-handed, to carry on the business at Elm Court. Owing to the Railway mania, then in its most frantic state, the business had been tremendously increased. A partner, therefore, had to be found. He was discovered in the person of Mr Digby Shirley.

Greater contrasts than Herbert Probyn and Digby Shirley it would be impossible to conceive. Mr Probyn had the appearance and manner of a highly respectable dignitary of the Church. A complete suit of black always encased his portly form. A white neck-cloth, such as graced the throat of George IV., entwined with many folds of ample cambric his ox-like neck, being finished with an elaborate tie in front—a genuine and honest bow. It seemed proud of looking what it really was; appearing to regard itself as a protest against the shams of haberdashers and laundresses.

A lengthy black waistcoat “with good capon lined” confined a snow-white shirt decorated with a frill. Beneath the waistcoat hung a watered ribbon and a bunch of family seals. It was impossible to contemplate that waistcoat, that

shirt frill, and those seals, and not feel penetrated with the conviction that Mr Herbert Probyn was an "eminently respectable man." On looking at him you saw at once that he was well to do. You felt he could refer you to Coutts and Co. with satisfaction; and that his paper would be considered as good as gold in the Bank parlour.

Jovial, pleasant, and chatty, every one was pleased to honour Mr Probyn in street or mart, in town-house, in country-hall, and in church vestry. He was "influential," and he deserved to be; for never had Herbert Probyn soiled his hands in any dirty work, or transacted business in any but an old-fashioned, honourable way.

Mr Digby Shirley was insinuating. He was a man of reticence. He never said anything but what was right; he never said it but in a way that was right; and he never spoke but when it was right to speak.

Mr Shirley had never been betrayed into a kindly deed to any one; but he always looked as though he were on the point of being detected in the performance of some splendid act of philanthropy, and was about to abandon himself for ever to the exclusive practice of benevolence.

He did nothing of the sort; he never said anything that could reasonably create such an impression. Nor did he ever utter any expression to which objection could be raised. Did Herbert Probyn blurt out a strong word in office to a client, then did Digby Shirley redden with confusion; but with a smile, a painful smile, he would look on the client with an imploring look petitioning for forgiveness for his Probyn, and for himself also, as though he were another Naaman bowing down in the house of Rimmon.

* Mr Digby Shirley, at the date to which reference is now made, might be a man of fifty summers. In person and in dress he affected fashion. Iron-grey hair, closely clipped, surmounted a tall square forehead. Not a projecting bump significant of wit or imagination interfered with that thoroughly "capable" forehead, which terminated in shaggy eye-brows that shaded a pair of cold, grey, quick, darting eyes.

A hooked nose—the bloom of which indicated the wearer's being troubled with chronic indigestion—overhung a pair of thin, pale lips, that looked as if they had not been made to laugh: but

only (and that rarely and measuredly) to let out words, and be instantly shut again, like a door that opened into the cabinet of a Private Inquiry Office, closing quickly upon the exit of a detective. Mr Shirley's words were detectives. He seldom spoke otherwise than to track out other men's thoughts or acts.

Middle-sized and spare, there was absolutely nothing about Digby that would have commanded a second look in a crowd. He was one of those men whom a man might meet in the street every day of his life and never remember: but when the face was more carefully contemplated it expressed a good deal. The quick, darting eye evidently took everything in at a glance. The big, hard forehead was plainly a muniment room full of shelves, where everything the eye had once seen was recorded, docketed, and put aside ready for use at any moment.

The lawyer was, in short, pre-eminently a man of penetration. His face, figure, gait, indicated this. When he engaged a client in conversation, his eyes wormed through his reserve, and pierced his secrets however well concealed. His smile made things pleasant. He was always

courteous, always agreeing and agreeable, always considerate for other men's comfort or ease, always at your service, and feeling highly honoured by your favouring him by asking his opinion, or deeming him able to give you advice. "N'être pas poli" would have been undiplomatic with Digby, as with the courtiers of Le Grand Monarque.

How did such a man come to be partner of Herbert Probyn? Thus. Mr Digby Shirley, and Mrs, and the children, worshipped in the next pew to the eminent and benevolent and philanthropic banker, Sir Jonathan Pole, Bart. Even in his religion Digby exercised penetration. What Pole subscribed to, Digby subscribed to—but always afar off, with the monetary sentiment of humility that became a Shirley "sitting under" the same ministry as a Pole. If the Baronet gave £1, the lawyer gave 10s. If Lady Pole contributed 30s. for a ticket book to the Soup-kitchen Fund, Mrs Digby Shirley sent a donation of 12s. 6d.

The proximity of pews gradually led to the respectful offering of small courtesies. Digby blessed Lady Pole's parasol. Did her Ladyship

on one sultry day hook that beautiful ivory handle over the door? Her Ladyship did. And when the tall powdered footman came with solemn tread to open the door, did that clumsy fellow not see the delicate sun-shade, but knock it down with a bang on the floor? Did not the courteous Digby instantly pick it up, rapidly present it to her Ladyship, and most obligingly venture to hope that her Ladyship's family were all well?

A bow of course was his recompense at their next meeting. Did not the bow warm into "Good morning, Sir John,—what a charming discourse to-day!—what beautiful metaphors!" So the thin edge of the wedge being once safely inserted, did not Digby Shirley take care to drive it home stealthily but steadily every week? until at a parochial meeting where he acted as Honorary Secretary, he so lucidly put upon paper the sentiments of Sir Jonathan touching the Christian duty of patronizing paupers, that the Baronet at the conclusion of business observed, "I am sure, Mr Digby Shirley, I cannot sufficiently express my obligation. We really seem to be so mutually interested in the affairs of this neighbourhood,

that I should feel pleased if Mrs Digby Shirley would allow Lady Pole to leave her card."

Oh! happy, happy day for Digby! oh goodly reward of his—penetration!

It is scarcely necessary to say that thenceforth the lawyer never lost sight of the Baronet, though it always appeared to Pole that it was he who did not lose sight of Digby.

The intimacy which began in church, and was strengthened at home, was cemented on the mart. It happened—of course by accident—that the lawyer had a neat little bit of business to transact for a client of the house with which at that time he was connected. Money had to be raised. A good rate of interest and the title-deeds of an estate were at Digby's command. "Would this be in the line of my friend the banker?" he asked himself.

The Bank parlour soon settled the question. It was very much in the line of the banker, who had the control of a good deal of money, and was always ready to put that money out at good interest upon the best security.

He considered moreover that in advancing

the sums required, while benefitting himself, he was showing attention to his obliging friend.

By degrees the city intimacy increased, until Sir Jonathan Pole found the conveyancer's experiences very useful and—very profitable.

Among the monied men who occasionally did business with Mr Herbert Probyn was the head of the banking firm just named.

Civilities were interchanged between the houses of Pole and Probyn, and in the most natural manner Mr Herbert mentioned to Sir Jonathan, subsequently to the death of his brother, that he was on the look-out for a partner. Thus Digby came to be recommended to Mr Probyn, and thus Sir Jonathan was made useful, without ever suspecting that he was being used for the worldly advancement of Mr Digby Shirley.

The third member of the firm, Mr Trigg, James Thelwall Trigg, was the son of a carpenter at Kirby Lonsdale. He had been sent to Launcester school during the life-time of the Rev. Dr Lawson—Miss Lawson's cousin. The boy's abilities had been recognized by the Doctor, and he had pushed him forward in

the school. Through the former's influence, Trigg had been articled to Messrs Probyn and Probyn. He had become a part of the "house," and through his quickness and trustworthiness had risen to the position of confidential clerk to the late Mr Probyn. Thoroughly master of the business of the firm, Thelwall Trigg was Mr Probyn's right hand while he lived: when he died, Mr Herbert awoke to a sense of his value.

On Shirley being admitted into the firm, whatever his talents might be, Herbert Probyn found that both he and his new partner must perpetually refer to some one familiar with "the connection." To Mr Shirley the clients were strangers. In addition, Mr Herbert Probyn was not very long in discovering that Mr Digby Shirley was sometimes really a little too clever. Probyn again and again found himself sanctioning measures which subsequently he did not approve, and wondered how he came to allow them. He was puzzled, then became contemplative,—finally alive to the fact that his partner's insinuating and persuasive advice had made him adopt proceedings which stood forth as his in-

dividual acts, with which subsequently Shirley seemed to have nothing to do.

He now began to feel uncomfortable, though not sharp enough to perceive that he was practically losing the control of his own affairs, while Mr Shirley seemed only to wait upon his will. A bright thought struck him. Why not make Trigg a junior partner with a small share in the profits of the firm? In Trigg he could confide. If Shirley was very sharp, so was Trigg. Shirley he had not long known, Trigg he had known since he was a school-boy. Consequently, enter Trigg a junior partner. Hence the firm "Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg."

Trigg was not long in the firm before he discovered that he had a mission. Mr Digby Shirley was his mission. Just as Blount Tempest had a strong first impression regarding Miss Massey, so had Trigg a strong first impression regarding Mr Shirley. The manners of the latter were extremely suave, almost deferential to Trigg. Inexperienced as he, Shirley, must necessarily be in the Probyn connection, he felt in promoting the interests of the house what in-

valuable help and *insight* into business he could obtain through the knowledge that Mr Trigg possessed. Shirley intended to be persuasive: he proved repulsive.

“Gammon,” muttered the other; and taking a proper measure of his man, he appreciated at its full value his partner’s impressiveness of manner.

“Knowledge is power,” Mr Shirley used to say: and would listen to the prattle of children with apparent, ay, real interest, because from the child he was almost certain to hear some domestic information dropped about papa or mamma. It is perfectly astonishing how much social scandal that amiable gentleman picked up by nursing and playing with the children of his friends. All was grist that came to his mill: and was carefully stored in the garner-house of his brain.

There are persons in this world too acute. Becoming so confident in their own powers of penetration they forget that others may be able to read character, and to feel the pulse of the moral constitution. Trigg was a very young man, yet he read his partner off as clearly and quickly as he would have read a page in a book.

The other never suspected this. He flattered himself that in the firm of Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg, there were three elements. First, the respectable; then the discerning; and lastly, the hard-working element. He regarded Trigg as a machine, made to execute a certain amount of labour in a day. Mr Probyn he considered a pompous, important, shallow man, whom he would twirl round his finger as he pleased. He regarded himself as the acute, observant, penetrating, never-miss-a-chance man of the world, grave, serious, respectable, engaging, agreeable, conversational, as occasion might require—the man to get on, and leap over the shoulders of other men into riches and prosperity.

At the age of nineteen, Blount Tempest proceeded to Oxford, and matriculated as a Gentleman Commoner at Magdalen College. Much about the same period, Geoffrey, his brother, was sent to London to read with the eminent conveyancers, “Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg,” the Probyns having had the management of the law affairs of the Tempest family for at least two generations.

On arriving in London, Geoffrey was com-

mended to the care of Mr Trigg, who was to present him to Mr Probyn, and to make his advent to office work as agreeable as possible. Of course the Baronet's nephew was kindly and courteously received by the head of the house. He was invited on several occasions to spend his Sundays at Teddington with Mr Probyn, in whose company he enjoyed the orthodoxy of the vicar in the morning, and the "old crusted" of the Probyn cellar in the evening.

Trigg was not in a position to show the young man social attentions, for as yet he merely occupied humble lodgings near the New Road, and his recollection of the station held by the Tempest family in the North made him shy of making any other advances to the nephew of Sir Nigel beyond such as he could legitimately offer him in office hours.

The second member of the firm was influenced by no such bashfulness. The Baronet's nephew, the twin brother of the heir to his broad acres, and (should anything happen to that brother) heir himself of Warfdale, was a young gentleman whose acquaintance ought to be cultivated. Had not Shirley two interesting daughters, both mar-

riageable? What was the vision that began to break upon his imagination?

Even a Baronet must die! He was satisfied of that. A nephew, perchance a young nephew, succeeds. The nephew, as Mr Digby Shirley has heard, is in residence as a Gentleman Commoner of Oxford. Do not young men sometimes contract extravagant and dissipated habits at college? Do they not occasionally ruin their constitutions and die early, or do they not sometimes come to a sudden end?

“Suppose a case,” suggested his eminently legal mind, moralizing to itself. “Sir Nigel in the course of nature cannot live long. The heir succeeds. If the heir lives, his brother must have a handsome fortune: if he dies childless, his brother inherits the title and the estates. ‘Sir Geoffrey and Lady Tempest!’ Good! It sounds well. Maria or Georgey would do well as mistress of Warfdale. Georgey would be dashing and attractive; but Maria would be more ambitious and more tractable. Through her I might manage the husband.

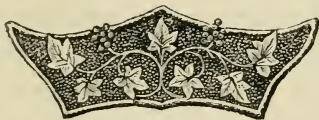
“A step up in life, Digby Shirley!” he murmured exultantly. “Yet mind what you are

about. The game is worth playing, and we will play it. But we must play it cautiously. Let me see, let me see. First of all, Mr Geoffrey Tempest must be won. Then I must awaken his ambition. This Blount—what is he? what are his habits? what can be done with him? No, no, Digby, that is not to be thought of. That would be flying at too high game. He is sure to know his own importance too well to condescend to Digby Shirley. I have one bird in the hand, I must leave the other in the bush. The thing is to make the bush-bird sing cheerfully for the interests of my bird. Geoffrey, ah, ah, Geoffrey, you are to be my bird in the hand.”

Thus did the penetrating Shirley begin to model out the future in the plastic clay of his cunning: and with the colours of his imagination painted a most glowing landscape. There was Warfdale Hall in the distance; banked-in with northern hills; a river flowed through the vale; noble oaks filled up the sides; and a well-posed “tableau” of his characters occupied the foreground, in which stood prominently Maria Shirley receiving a paternal benediction from her re-

spected parent, as she was about to be united to Sir Geoffrey Tempest, Baronet, amidst the pealing of church bells and the delighted shouts of an admiring tenantry.

“Oh, Lady Pole,” he muttered, “what a blessing that parasol of yours may prove eventually! What great endings may arise from that very small beginning! Ah, yes. What a privilege it is to worship in an adjoining pew to the serious-minded family of ‘a great London Banker.’ ”





CHAPTER XI.

MUSICAL ADVENTURERS.

MR CUSACK CREEVY was a clerk of many years' standing in the house of Probyn. Assiduous in his duties, he was always at hand when wanted; could remember a date—any date when any one had called, or anything had happened. He could tell the age of every Peer of the realm, and every M.P. of any distinction. He knew when any one of the judges was raised to the Bench, what great trials he had conducted, how in his younger days he had misconducted himself, where he lived, how he lived, where he died, what he died of, and where he was buried.

Creevy was the son of a farm bailiff in Ireland, and at an early age had been brought over to England to give evidence before the House of

Commons regarding a case of bribery at a contested election. He became so enamoured of lawyers and of the subtlety of their arguments, that he resolved to dedicate his gifts to the humbler walks of the profession. In the house of Probyn he began active life: to the house of Probyn he has since adhered. When Mr Shirley first entered the house, Creevy was the most familiar with the routine of general business.

The former soon appreciated his peculiar acquirements, and determined in due season to make use of them. If Creevy heard a speech or listened to an eloquent discourse he could repeat almost word for word the language of the speaker. So valuable a gift did not long remain concealed.

The useful clerk became acquainted with reporters and subsequently with editors. A little later he found himself seated and entertained at annual festivals of public charities at the London Tavern, where he was employed to report the speeches of eminent philanthropists. In this way he established a "connection" of his own, to which his Milesian humour made him highly acceptable.

On leaving the establishment of Probyn,

Shirley, and Trigg, when office-hours were over, Creevy ceased to be Creevy. From the legal grub he changed into a flashy butterfly. It was under the name of Julius Montgomery that he appeared now at a tavern, now at a concert, now at a political meeting, and anon, in the press of the session, in the Reporters' Gallery of the House of Commons. At the London Tavern he was peculiarly in his element.

The head waiter knew his tastes, and always took care to bring him his favourite dishes. The stewards of festivals became familiar with Mr Montgomery, recognized him as an established reporter of public dinners, and gave particular orders that he should be well supplied with good things. The secretaries, too, always happened to stop with a friendly salutation.

Mr Julius Montgomery had a soul for music, and the "professionals" accustomed to sing "Non Nobis," "Hearts of Oak," &c., at the Tavern and Freemason's, always cast kindly glances at him, in anticipation perhaps of a friendly paragraph.

A man so inclined for harmony could hardly escape the tender passion and, as a matter of

course, matrimony. Miss Waverley earned at concerts and musical festivals a very decent competence. The violoncello at a Worcester triennial meeting had become enamoured of her and had made her his wife. Miss Waverley's talents were transferred to the Metropolis, where the lawyer's clerk met her in the first year of her widowhood, left alone in the world with "one darling babe," the pledge of the departed violoncello.

Rather earlier than a twelvemonth and a day "Miss Waverley," as she continued to be styled, became Mrs Cusack Creevy, and thenceforth was professionally known as Madame Waverley Montgomery.

The pledge of the departed instrumentalist growing tall and strong, was transferred to Oxford, where his mother's friends succeeded in securing him an election into the Magdalen School and the post of chorister boy in the chapel of that college.

When the earnings at Lincoln's Inn came to be thrown into the same cash-box as the professional "fees" of Madame Waverley Montgomery, the result was highly satisfactory. In short, the

world smiled upon the clever Creevy, and he throve. Madame formed singing classes, and took pupils to reside with her, in training for the profession. This also was profitable.

It was suggested to the clever clerk that the joint income might be still further improved if a lodging-house were started in a highly respectable neighbourhood, where "artists" could find every required accommodation, and be near the great scenes of action. A house in Half-Moon St, Piccadilly, therefore was secured and furnished by a broker.

The musical world was well informed of the advantages which this residence offered, and the speculation promised to be a decided success.

Their lodger on the ground-floor was a musical agent. Mr Stapleton's income was derived from the per-centage taken off the salaries of weary songsters, for whom he made engagements at concerts, in companys, and for provincial tours. The drawing-room floor was tenanted by a prima donna; the second story accommodated the family of Montgomery and pupils; while the airy regions, "with a charming view over the

“Green Park,” were inhabited by a flute from the Opera, and the cornet à piston of a dance band.

It has been said that Madame Waverley Montgomery had pupils in training,—one pupil at least. During a tour in the provinces Madame had met with a girl of singularly powerful and musical voice, who possessed likewise no ordinary recommendation in a pretty face. The child was literally bought from its parents, who were tempted, by gold and fair promises, to part with her. It matters not what her real name was, for in Half-Moon Street she was invested with a musical title, and the Montgomery circle knew her only as Clara Harcourt. She was fed, clothed, housed, taught, schooled, as a speculation. She attended the Royal Academy of Music; she learned calisthenic exercises; she was instructed in deportment; she was tutored by “professors;” she could go through a series of attitudes or studies from pictures and statues; in short, everything that could be done to fit her for a great musical success was attempted. She possessed everything but a home.

Madame Waverley never seemed to remember

that her pupil was a fellow-creature, with human feelings, passions, or affections. She regarded her simply and solely as a singing machine, which was to be brought as nearly as possible to perfection, for the exclusive benefit of her own family.

What with office-hours during the day and "the profession" at night, together with the general management of the establishment in Half-Moon Street, it is apparent that the time of Cusack Creevy was fully occupied.

But occupation fell upon the shoulders of a man able to sustain it. The clever clerk had from his first start in life accepted the dictum of Iago, to put money in his purse: honestly if he could. Seemingly honest he always would. Dishonestly, if he felt sure of not being found out.

Such were the associates of Geoffrey Tempest when he commenced reading for the law. They were not exactly such as his uncle would have selected for him had he known their antecedents; perhaps the young man might have made a better selection had a choice been left him, but he felt that he had no option but to accept the inferior society into which his inferior position had cast him.

Blount, he complained to himself, had been sent to college, and would be hand and glove with all the Tufts there, while he was doomed to pass his time with a lot of snobs whom Sir Nigel would think hardly worthy to brush his brother's boots.

This was another grievance, and the discontented spirit nursed it day after day till it grew as vigorous as those of earlier growth. His nature had become a hot-house where such plants were secretly cultivated with hope of turning them to profit at some not very remote period.

In the mean time his policy was to watch and wait. It was not improbable, he thought, that among the lawyers he should be able to pick up knowledge that might be useful to him. He had long entertained an idea that law was a very powerful engine, which could be turned to incalculable advantage by any one inclined to test its strength to the utmost, and he had both heard and read many suggestive stories of legal ambition prodigally rewarded.

The impression such ideas made on his mind, and the bright prospect that often dazzled his imagination, had induced him to select the law as a profession, so he submitted to the drudgery of

the usual course of reading and copying, regarding it as a means to an end, intermitting his dry studies with sullen broodings over his imaginary wrongs, and feverish dreams of the remedy that was to end them.

Geoffrey Tempest, however, was not content to be a dreamer of dreams. Whatever he suffered did not take from him his capacity to enjoy. He was young, good-looking, and liberally provided with funds, and was moreover well aware that the modern Babylon afforded innumerable sources of pleasure it was not imperative that he should deny himself. Nor was he ignorant of the social value of the advantages he possessed, or his more important "contingencies."

So that he was quite ready to be made much of by any one who should desire to make the most of him, to forward particular schemes of his or her own. He knew his own claims to notice, and his own interests quite as well.





CHAPTER XII.

THE DIGBY SHIRLEYS "AT HOME."



At the period of Mr Shirley's promotion to partnership with Mr Probyn, his family were "plain, homely people." When he had once safely mounted a step on the ladder of life it was necessary to migrate, and establish himself with a fashionable direction in the Court Guide. He knew that there is as much in a direction as in a name.

What miserable attics for homes some men will put up with, if they can succeed in becoming members of a good club, such being considered a first-class address. "The Carlton," or "The United Service," or the "Travellers," reads well on a card. Noble ladies whose "high lineage springs" from famous ancestors, would stare, if beneath the name of many of their bachelor

visitors' club they could read the direction of his bed-room! Mr Shirley felt a first-class address was necessary to his "respectability," an address to which Mr Probyn might occasionally be invited, and where Lady Pole might call.

"The district of Grosvenor Place, or Eaton Square, my dear Matilda," said the thoughtful husband, brushing his hat one morning previous to setting out for Lincoln's Inn, "should be well house-hunted; it would be of immense importance to the girls if we could meet with something reasonable in that quarter."

Something reasonable was met with in Wilton Street, Grosvenor Place, and there the family was located when Geoffrey Tempest came to town.

Shortly afterwards a card reached his lodgings.

MR and MRS DIGBY SHIRLEY
request the honour of
MR GEOFFREY TEMPEST'S company
to dinner,
Saturday, Feb. 26th, at 8 o'clock.
30, Wilton St., Grosvenor Place.

At 8 o'clock on the day named Geoffrey presented himself at the first-class address. The

new tenant was in the dining-room, decanting the wine.

“My dear sir, I am my own butler,” he was in the habit of explaining to his friends, “my man-servant is so apt to cloud the port.”

The truth being that this domestic was hired only for the occasion. He had been a footman, but was now proprietor of spring-vans in the neighbouring mews.

On seeing Geoffrey Tempest descend from his cab, Mr Shirley hastened to meet him in the passage, politely called “the hall.”

“My dear sir, I feel highly honoured, greatly pleased by your favouring us with your society. I do assure you, my dear sir, this is really very pleasant and very kind of you; very kind indeed,” violently shaking him by the hand.

The young man did not precisely see the kindness, so contented himself with stammering out something about mutual pleasure, and permitted himself to be conducted to the drawing-room.

There Mrs Digby Shirley sat enthroned. At first sight it occurred to the visitor that he was about to be presented to Queen Elizabeth. Mrs

Shirley had a mediæval aspect. A brocaded gown, elaborately ornamented with old point; a stomacher heaving with Mechlin; a head-dress of Valenciennes covering a profusion of grey hair curled, frizzled, and crisped, and the neck encompassed by a paling of starched lace, must be allowed to be a striking costume for a private individual in the reign of Queen Victoria.

Mrs Shirley rose with great dignity, and received the young gentleman in his new suit and kid gloves with a curtesey she had been studying for a month.

Miss Maria and Miss Georgiana (the latter familiarly "Georgey") stood like maids of honour beside their queenly mother.

The elder was a combination of her mother's loftiness of stature and her father's peculiarity of nose. Georgey exhibited no apparent relationship to either. She was pretty, with dark eyes, dark hair, a pair of cherry-coloured lips, and a happy smile. She would have been rather striking-looking had not nature given her a thick-set figure and a coffee-coloured complexion. Of course they floated in a sea of tarletan, indeed both had been got up quite regardless of expense.

A faded female, a distant connection, from whom the family had expectations, was the only other lady present. There were a brace of fashionable gentlemen, who possessed good-sounding names as well as first-rate addresses, at whose presence the aboriginal acquaintances of the Shirleys in Camden Town would have stared.

The Honourable Archibald Cavendish was well known in Rotten Row, at the Opera, and elsewhere in fashionable life. He was indebted to the Burlington Arcade for his hair, to Bond Street for his whiskers, to Cavendish Square for his teeth, and to various other well-known localities for other artificial attractions, and, at the age of sixty-five, the restorers of faded humanity, there carrying on their several vocations flattered him with the assurance that he made up admirably for a man of forty.

Mr Henry Balfour was young, apparently simple and ingenuous, with a light complexion and a prepossessing, gentlemanlike demeanour. He could bring people together. He knew everything about everybody, and had the happiest capacity of putting the rich and noble "up to a thing," on the Stock Exchange, in shares, or in

investments. The rotund citizen, with commercial hat and black velvet waistcoat, peculiar in his manners, who was the diurnal tenant of an express omnibus at 9 A. M. to the "Bank" and Cheapside, found in Mr Henry Balfour a convenient link between high and mercantile life. So did many other persons.

Mr Henry Balfour found in turn a profitable per-centage from bringing the City and the West End in pretty close approximation. How this convenient gentleman managed to move about the City regularly, and yet not to be of the City, it would be difficult to describe. He was never seen there to be recognized. It would have seemed as natural to expect the Lord Chancellor in wig and gown on Cornhill or in Threadneedle Street. Mr Balfour was seen, and regularly seen, only where a Balfour should be seen. As the nephew of an Earl and son of an Honourable, where should he be but at the West End?

Mr Shirley and the faded female, Mrs Shirley and the Honourable Archibald, Miss Shirley and Geoffrey Tempest, Georgey and Mr Balfour paired off to dinner.

Mr Digby Shirley had heard that a celebrated

Welsh bishop, equally great upon Greek accident and good living, pronounced eight to be the proper number for a dinner-party. Therefore he always invited eight, and during the repast invariably related this anecdote. With the exception of one or two slight errors, such as iceing the Burgundy, and an audible apology from the van proprietor for the absence of the lobster cutlets (which had not arrived from the confectioner's), things went off with tolerable regularity.

Maria Shirley was evidently not only the genius but the presiding genius of the establishment. She presided over Mrs Shirley, and her opinion too was reverentially taken by her father. It was not known whether her sister had any opinions; if she had, she never expressed them.

"Water, cold this morning, very cold, very cold indeed," observed the Honourable Archibald, at the close of the favourite anecdote concerning the Welsh bishop.

Mr Shirley was addressed; and felt it was necessary to reply.

"Are you partial to water?" he inquired.

"Could not live without it," answered Mr Cavendish. "Grand thing for the spine."

His host looked perplexed. What connection there could be between cold water and the vertebral column he evidently did not perceive.

"I have seen no water since I came to London," observed Geoffrey.

"What!" cried Mrs Digby Shirley, striving to look poetical; "*not* by

‘That shore where Thames’ translucent stream
Reflects new glories on his breast,’

as the poet says."

"But it is not translucent, is it, papa?" inquired Georgey.

"How absurd you are, Georgey, you never seem to understand a quotation," said Maria in her most dogmatic manner.

This snub was followed by a slight pause.

"I believe Warfdale is the name of your uncle's property?" observed Mr Shirley—(he "*believed!*" did he not *know?*)

"Nephew of Sir Nigel Tempest?" inquired Mr Balfour.

"Oh yes."

"I had the pleasure of his brother's acquaintance," added Mr Balfour, with emphasis. "He

voted for the Catholic Emancipation, I think, a great mistake—”

“My father, sir,” said Geoffrey.

“Ah! I remember your father well,” said the Honourable Archibald. “I can remember your being born,” he continued with a chuckle, as if no one could possibly believe that he was old enough to remember anything so remote.

“Oh! Mr Cavendish, how very old you must be,” exclaimed the junior young lady artlessly.

A dead silence, an awful silence followed this thoughtless remark.

“Does Sir Nigel come to town this season?” asked Mr Balfour, hurriedly, as if to show his social tact.

“It is very uncertain.”

“I hope he remains as hale and hearty as ever.”

“Thank you. He is pretty well.”

“And your brother, what is he doing?” inquired Balfour, with an air of interest.

“Oh, Blount! Blount is gone to Oxford.”

“Indeed! I am an Oxford man. What college is he at?”

“Magdalen!”

"So, so, under dear old Routh! Dr Routh is a very old friend of my father's."

"Who is Dr Routh?" inquired Mrs Digby Shirley.

"My dear madam," answered Balfour, "you really surprise me! He is the President!"

The President! Here was a source of perplexity for the easily perplexed hostess.

"The President is head of the college, my dear," humbly suggested Mr Shirley, who dreaded his wife making a blunder, and equally dreaded her wrath should he venture to correct her.

"Of course, of course," remarked the lady.

"Has your brother been long at Magdalen?" inquired Mr Balfour.

"No, he is a Freshman."

"Your brother is your senior, I believe?" said the host.

"We are twins," replied Geoffrey.

"We were two daughters of one race!" murmured Maria pellucidly.

"Did Tennyson ever write a poem upon twins?" inquired Georgey.

"Georgey, how can you be so exceedingly

absurd?" exclaimed Maria with severe countenance.

When the sumptuous repast was ended and the ladies had withdrawn, the Honourable Archibald thought it would be complimentary to the stranger to narrate all he knew about Geoffrey's father, uncle, or family.

Mr Shirley smiled approvingly, and gave his undivided attention.

What a virtue there is in patient listening. Your good listener is often a far more agreeable member of society than your great talker. The great talker, though agreeable to the guests generally, is certain to excite jealousy in the breast of the moderate talker. He who cannot talk fluently on popular topics thinks the man who can a bore, possibly a self-opinionated, conceited donkey. But he who respectfully listens, listens to all small talk, all reminiscences ("I remember when I was a child," &c. &c.), all experiences, and all travels or sporting incidents, makes no enemies, and wins innumerable friends!

Such an admirable listener was Mr Digby Shirley, though perhaps with very different mo-

tives to ordinary listeners at dinner-parties. He argued in his own mind, that if a man will smile and listen, he is certain to learn something useful from the over-communicative.

“Never ask questions if you wish to gain information,” was one of his proverbs, which though not stolen from Rochefoucault, was worthy of that authority. “If you will only listen, people will tell you all you want to know. Ask them about what you desire to learn, and they will probably not reply; either because they will suspect you have some motive for asking, or because they will think, perhaps, they had better not tell.”

While the Hon. Archibald told his experiences over his wine, and Balfour cross-examined Geoffrey, their attentive host learned every particular he desired to ascertain regarding the Tempest property; and yet, though polite to his guests, he seemed the least interested in the subject of the four at table.

When at length the familiar words “Shall we join the ladies” were uttered, he had ascertained the age of Sir Nigel, his habits, his life: the date of the death of Geoffrey’s father: the date of the

birth of the twins: the prospects of the heir: and last, though not least, Mr Digby discovered that the twins were not the most cordial of brothers!

Maria and Georgey and their mother formed a charming trio, and greatly delighted their friends in the drawing-room. The latter cultivated a taste for literature and art, which she exhibited by endeavouring to attract around her as many authors and artists as chose to accept her invitations. Her circle of acquaintance had not yet become large. Nevertheless, like the circles made in water that create fresh ones, each comprehending its predecessor, she found that at every successive "at home," hers expanded.

When the gentlemen arrived in the drawing-room, the Queen of Wilton Street was holding her court. She had a "reception." The temporary groom of the chambers was at the head of the stairs announcing the arrivals in rapid succession, while a coachman, borrowed for the night from a friend, stood at the foot, and hallooed the names of the thronging company, as if he were a skipper giving orders to the men in the main-top.

Stories, we are told, never lose in the telling. Names, travelling up-stairs at a party, occasionally undergo most extraordinary improvements. Gentlemen with monosyllabic appellations who enter a hall door as Jones, have a chance of being landed in the drawing-room as Johnson, Jackson, or Jenkinson; but woe betide the man who trusts a name of three syllables to such handling. The purgatorial process it has to suffer in getting up-stairs is sure to make him as much a puzzle to himself as to his acquaintances.

Geoffrey Tempest being a stranger and everybody strange to him, Maria Shirley took him under her protection (she protected every young man that would allow her). As the visitors arrived, she instructed the young gentleman who everybody was. His observation of the degree of agitation the lace stomacher suffered while its wearer greeted each fresh arrival, enabled him to ascertain the exact value at which the presence of every guest was estimated.

Mr and Mrs Digby Shirley had their individual predilections. The lady's were directed to the arts and sciences; the husband's to philanthropy and the cardinal virtues. At the

Wilton Street "at homes" there was a pleasing mixture of society—a compound of all possible social ingredients.

While Geoffrey watched the arrivals, he observed his host make a sudden dash across the drawing-room to the door as if he had been taken suddenly ill. Something unusual had evidently happened, for Mrs Shirley's magazine of lace was singularly agitated as soon as her husband was seen to plunge violently down the stairs. Suspense was presently relieved by the voice of the temporary groom of the chambers announcing with extraordinary loudness the advent of Sir Jonathan and Lady Pole!

Geoffrey's attention was directed to the doorway. Presently he beheld Mr Shirley advancing backward, with a bow at every step (he only wanted a white wand in his hand to fit him for the office of a deputy chamberlain), until having reached the side of his spouse, he ejaculated with very strong emphasis, "My dear—SIR JOHN AND LADY POLE."

"I am enchanted to see your Ladyship. It is extremely kind of you, my Lady, to honour us with your presence! Really, this is a great

favour you have conferred on us. A little music, and a few of the literati, that is all! Shirley, my love, can you find Lady Pole a seat?"

The delighted host, with another very low genuflexion, ventured to offer her Ladyship his arm, which that gorgeous female condescended to accept. Standing beside Mr Shirley, she was literally "gorgeous," for being a tall woman, large in proportion, and dressed in green velvet, her Ladyship looked expansive enough to have enveloped his slender figure in the folds of her prodigious skirt.

Sir Jonathan was a tall and portly man, with a large head—very bald, an unctuous face, and double chin. He seemed to have lived on a feast of fat things. An oleaginous benignity exuded over his countenance. He had acquired great popularity among Exeter Hall philanthropists, by whom he was regarded as a benefactor to his species—a powerful advocate of the interests of humanity and the progress of the human race.

"Papa is a great admirer of Sir Jonathan," remarked Maria, on returning to her seat, after having made a reverential courtesy to Lady Pole.

“Indeed,” answered Geoffrey, his face betokening that he was a little surprised at the admiration.

“You must know Sir Jonathan Pole?” said the young lady, inquiringly.

“I never even heard of the gentleman. I am grossly ignorant, Miss Shirley! Pray enlighten me!”

Whereupon she applied herself to inform his mind respecting her father’s distinguished guest.

Passing from the lion of the evening, Geoffrey led on his instructress to describe to him the rest of the menagerie—and she performed the duties of showman so well, that she and her companion became very good friends, particularly when he annotated her information with facetious comments of his own, which she seemed to relish greatly.

“Mrs Montgomery and Miss Clara Harcourt,” shouted the coachman. Geoffrey’s eyes involuntarily turned towards the door to examine the new arrivals. He was instantly struck by their demeanour and costume. It seemed to him that both were a little prononcé, the ladies being slightly Spanish about the head, Swiss about the shoulders,

and French in their expansive drapery. There was so decided an air of patronage of the new comers in Mr Shirley, that he felt curious to know who they were.

As they passed across the room, they were recognized with a suppressed murmur and with stage whispers.

“Oh, where! which!” an enthusiastic young lady was heard to exclaim, as she turned round with a start and put her glasses to her eyes to examine the strangers.

The younger of the two swept haughtily across the room, and with her protectress was quickly seated near the grand piano, where she was welcomed with the highest consideration by two or three gentlemen of very foreign aspect, the flute from the Opera being one, but from his manner no one would have suspected that he had ever seen the ladies before.

“Have you ever heard Miss Clara Harcourt?” inquired Maria.

“Never! You see I am such a stranger in London that I know no one.”

“Oh, I thought you might have heard her; she is our *singing mistress* ;” and the young lady’s

eyes watched those of her companion as the last words fell off her tongue with a depreciatory inflection of the voice, clearly intended to intimate that Miss Harcourt was no friend, only a paid instructress.

"Indeed!" answered Geoffrey, "I had no idea that such—such—I really am at a loss for a word—such a stylish-looking lady would give lessons!"

"How absurd, Mr Tempest. Your ignorance is quite amusing. People will do anything for money."

"Indeed," he repeated with a start, beginning to suspect that his fair friend knew much more of the world than he did. His surprise was observed.

"Will they not?" she inquired, her twinkling, cunning eye with a side-long glance fixed upon his face.

"I should not have supposed that Miss Harcourt would do anything for money."

"Perhaps not," was the reply, "but her chamberone will."

"And that person is—?"

"Madam Waverley Montgomery—who has

taught her, and brought her out in her profession, and will try to make a bargain of her."

"How so?"

"By living on her," added Maria, *sotto voce*, as the subject of their conversation approached, music in hand.

"Mrs Shirley wishes for a little music, Miss Maria," she whispered, "would you and your sister like to attempt 'Oh! Madra Mea?'"

"Pray do, Miss Shirley," interposed Geoffrey, as he rose with an air of entreaty, constrained to be civil to the daughter of his host, but hoping by this move to make the acquaintance of her more attractive instructress.

"Are you fond of music, Mr Tempest? Our singing is quite absurd, but if you wish it I will call Georgey."

Miss Shirley moved away in search of her sister, leaving Geoffrey and Clara Harcourt standing face to face beside the piano. There had been no introduction, but the situation was embarrassing, and the inexperienced young man felt it so.

The movement of the cantatrice had occasioned that rustle and subsequent silence of expectation

which invariably overtakes a babbling evening party when a move towards the favourite musical instrument first takes place. Some one is going to favour society with a song; and society regards the favour in a very solemn light, until it is conferred. The buzz of conversation instantly becomes stilled. Whispers float upon the air, while ladies arrange their dresses to face the instrument, and knots of gentlemen discussing politics, philanthropy, or science, wheel about, and stand staring in mute expectancy.

When the music once begins, society takes courage and re-opens its mouth. Ladies talk behind fans, and gentlemen in the midst of a thrilling bravura are heard relapsing into matter-of-fact conversations to the intense disgust of the performers who are "favouring" them.

Geoffrey's situation was awkward. The preliminary hush occurred while he was standing *vis-à-vis* to the musical celebrity from whom the company were looking for entertainment.

"You are an accomplished vocalist, Miss Harcourt," he blurted out, catching at the first distinct idea his mind allowed him to master.

"You are very complimentary, sir," responded

the lady, self-possessed and at ease. With the tact however that always helps a woman and so often deserts a man, she perceived that her companion was utterly unable to express another idea.

“You have only lately come to town, I believe, Mr Tempest?” she said.

Geoffrey bowed, “Very lately.”

“Are you a stranger in London?”

“I never was in town until a week ago.”

“What a number of new sensations you will experience! I had heard of your arrival.”

“You seem to know my name.”

“Oh, yes, I always—”

At this moment Miss Maria returned accompanied by her sister, and the three ladies took up their position at the piano.

Geoffrey thought he saw a slight frown upon the brow of the elder Miss Shirley as she approached, but it instantly changed to a smile.

It was a frown, and it expressed anger. It was very far from Maria Shirley's intention that Geoffrey Tempest and Clara Harcourt should be introduced to one another. The concert singer and singing mistress had been invited

to make the evening's reception attractive, but the furthest thought from her pupil's mind (for Maria managed all domestic affairs) was that she should have an opportunity of fascinating any of her own male friends or possible admirers.

Had the fair Maria guessed that Clara read her mind through and through and was already determined to take her pastime thereby, it is unnecessary to remark that neither Madame Montgomery nor Miss Harcourt would ever have crossed the threshold of the Wilton Street residence again.

Georgey played the accompaniment, Maria and her mistress occupying the usual positions right and left, while Geoffrey undertook, at the suggestion of Maria, the honourable office of turning over the leaves of the music.

Nature has certainly created beings fitted for particular offices, but Geoffrey Tempest was not created for his present office, and he felt annoyed with the position in which Maria Shirley had placed him, from the conviction that her object was to keep him at her own side and cut off communications with her dangerous music mistress.

Miss Shirley was out-generalled. Necessity compelled her to look towards her music, and also towards the lady whose voice she had to accompany. The consequence was that Miss Maria was unconscious of the marked manner in which Clara sang *at* her particular friend and possible admirer.

At every cadence of her voice her large dark eyes fell upon the young man, apparently seeking for his approval, their expression almost saying, "I am singing to you and for you. Do you not admire, are you not enchanted?"

Meanwhile, in the trio, Maria and Georgey sang with tremendous emphasis, "doing great credit" (as their politic Papa took occasion to remark) "to their mistress," at which the latter bit her lips, and would gladly have enjoyed an opportunity of boxing Mr Shirley's ears.

Both youths and grey-beards are susceptible to the attack of womankind, particularly when the murderous assault of bright eyes keeps up a "killing fire." Between the attentions of Maria and the glances of Clara, the advancing favours of the one, the retreating allurements

of the other, Geoffrey felt himself well occupied if not highly gratified.

In due course the company paired off to the supper-room. Of course Geoffrey offered his arm to Maria, but in doing so, the infirmity of the flesh betrayed him into looking curiously to see who would have the pleasure of taking down Clara Harcourt. While doing so, he caught another glance of the songtress fixed upon him, though her eyes instantly fell on encountering his own, as if their owner was inwardly chiding herself for being detected in a very foolish act. That glance was long remembered.

For the moment it made the young lawyer's conduct and conversation rather remarkable; but if there was any confusion in his manners or eccentricity in the way in which he insisted upon his fair companion partaking of every dish at the table, that young lady was self-confident enough to believe it arose from the very decided impression she had made upon him. An impression had been made upon him, but not by her.

On the whole, however, Geoffrey emerged from the dining-room and his *tête-à-tête* with Maria, leaving on that young lady's mind a conviction that he was an exceedingly amusing young man, with quaint ideas about people that were entertaining, that he would make a very good "friend of Papa's," and hanger-on at Wilton Street, and he might perhaps!—but time would show.

When the company of the evening had dispersed, when Science was jolting home in a cab, and Philanthropy with thoughts of benevolence was looking down from its brougham upon the fallen and the outcast as it wended its way homewards, the family of Shirley drew round the fire to discuss the company, and especially the new acquaintance.

It was resolved :

1st. That the entertainment had been a great success.

2nd. That Clara Harcourt had given herself great airs.

3rd. That Geoffrey Tempest was a most agreeable young man, and that Papa should show him attention.



CHAPTER XIII.

AN ADVENTURESS.

LARA HARCOURT was well calculated to attract the attention of any susceptible young man. She had in her favour beauty, style, manner, confidence, and ease in conversation.

Circumstances had cast her lot in a position wherein tact and penetration were not only valuable but necessary. What she despised in her pro-parents, the Creevys, she practised herself.

Example with young minds is not only catching, but irresistible. The child cannot live day by day and year by year associated with persons possessed of selfish and deceitful dispositions, and not contract feelings similarly calculating and disingenuous.

The protégée of the Montgomerys was desti-

tute of any high moral principle. No such motive-power regulated or guided her conduct. At the same time she had an intuitive appreciation of it and admiration for it. Her natural instincts were good, her educational acquirements bad. The one led her to perceive that the whole course, object, purpose, of her career was wrong ; the other led her to put up with the wrong and to practise it.

She had not grown into womanhood without weighing in a just balance the characters of the two people she was living with. She regarded and despised them as hucksters ; and she felt herself to be their goods, docketed for sale at a certain price. They were trading in her, and she knew it. She hated them for this. She blushed for herself, as an adventuress, but never thought of resisting her fate. The schemes her owners contrived she was content to work out. What they planned, she performed. But in doing so, she despised both them and herself.

Had any one asked Clara why she suffered herself to be used as a marketable article by the Montgomerys ; why, having reached womanhood and being of age, she did not take advantage of the

rights which the law allowed her, she would have shrugged her shoulders, and replied, "What could she do?"

The same reply under similar circumstances would have fallen from thousands of lips besides hers. Lives are lived out, and multitudes of human beings continue to do the things they are indisposed to do, simply from habit. In the case of this adventuress, such indisposition was not thorough. She hated being treated as a property, the purpose of which was to enrich the present proprietors, but she did not hate the adulation and admiration which in the pursuit of her profession for their aggrandizement she received.

The love of admiration was her bane, and at the same time the antidote to rebellion against the Montgomery designs. In public, she was ambitious to excel, because she enjoyed surpassing her rivals and securing for herself the chief applause of the multitude. In private, it was her delight to seduce the attention of the men from her rival beauties, and to appropriate as much as possible to herself the devotion that ought to have been shared by others. Nature had been prodigal in

lavishing upon her gifts whereby she was ordinarily certain of success in this feminine game. Clara was essentially a man's beauty. Her own sex generally did not think her beautiful, and out of pique and annoyance affected not to think her attractive. Whatever might be the true cause of their opinion, she was always run down by these ladies' patronesses. She was too big, or too coarse; or she wanted refinement and repose; or her hands showed the absence of breeding; or her feet and ankles were like those of a dairy-maid.

Whether the philosopher is correct who teaches us that truth wears various aspects when viewed in different lights, need not to be determined here; but it may with certainty be asserted that beauty wears a very different appearance when viewed by male or female eyes. The charms of Clara Harcourt, which her own sex could not see, were apparent to the man-kind who listened to her in public, or had the privilege of approaching her in private.

Though it suited the depreciatory purpose of the young ladies who were jealous of her popularity to call her big, coarse, vulgar, she was

nothing of the kind. She was tall. Her shoulders and arms were admirably proportioned, and graced with dimples at the elbows. Her waist was not too small, her hands—well, truth must be told—they were perhaps a trifle too large, caused perhaps by straining at the piano. Her male admirers only smiled when this was referred to, and thought her face made ample amends for such an unimportant defect.

She was possessed of the commanding carriage and nobility of person that belonged to Mrs Siddons. Indeed, she looked as if she had been born of the Kemble family. But in her features there was a softness and sweetness of expression no one of that dramatic race possessed. Her large dark eyes were saved from any look of fierceness by the unusual thickness of the fringing eye-lashes, which seemed to throw a shadow upon the cheek.

Of late years the French ladies have cultivated the fashion of dividing the hair into three compartments, making the central one form an acute angle over the brow, and brushing it tightly back. The effect is most unpleasant. It gives a bold expression to the countenance, combined

with a look of affright, as if the proprietor had met with some supernatural visitation, and her *un*-combined locks stood on end—so ill can the face (particularly the female face) bear to be robbed of the relief which a woman's tresses give to the features.

Had the face of Clara been scrutinized with her hair drawn back from the face, it would have seemed more massive and perhaps more masculine than most young ladies'; but it so happened that in the adornment of luxuriant glossy brown hair nature had endowed her with her chiefest beauty.

Her female critics all allowed "that certainly her hair was magnificent," excepting one rigid spinster who had a talent for saying agreeable things, and she despitefully described her as "the hairy woman." Men, who raved about her, protested that her hair alone made amends for her defective hands. Her difficulty was to know how to bind it together, to plait, and confine it to her head, its growth was so luxuriant. She could not only sit upon it, but almost stand upon it. The glossy silkiness softened and refined her features, making the face peculiarly one of *expression*.

Such was Clara Harcourt. It was impossible for her to be seen anywhere without commanding attention. Academicians entreated her to be the originals of their Constances, Diana Vernons, their Katherines, and Marie Antoinettes. Etty had delighted in persuading her to sit to him for a "study;" and, had Sir Joshua known her, Nelly o'Brien might not perhaps have been so great a favourite in Leicester Square.

She was attractive from accidental circumstances. She was professional, and a great favourite. To whatever reason it may be traced, there is no question that professional ladies exercise a peculiar fascination. The public has surrounded such persons with an atmosphere of romance; and whether they like it or not, insist upon regarding them as inhabitants of a sort of fairy world, that is altogether removed from the common-place, matter-of-fact business of life.

Authors and magazine writers have unkindly taken delight in tearing away the veils of fancy in which society loves to shroud the beings who minister to its social entertainment and intellectual recreation. It is an unkind act, for which society will never thank them. When steam and

iron, coal and telegraphs are making the world a workshop where everything is done with a whiz and a whirl, amidst the hissing of pipes and pistons, and the eternal clatter of revolving wheels, the scribes of useful knowledge might be content to leave a few occupations in life invested with a touch of romance.

In such an atmosphere Clara lived and moved. It had its fascination for the gay and fashionable class among whom her lot was cast, and in private it conferred upon her an attractiveness which made her out-distance many a girl with personal gifts superior to her own, and of rank far above her. Her female detractors always asserted that she wore false hair, had rouge upon her cheeks, stained her eye-lashes and eye-brows with burnt hair-pins, and was a mass of pretension, affectation, and presumption; but Clara cared for none of these slanders. She could afford to laugh at women's spite. Fully conscious that she was a man's beauty she revenged herself upon the envy of the youthful, and the acidity of the elder virgins of her acquaintance, by enticing all the young men that she could contrive to allure.

It must be allowed that the adventuress

was in addition pronounced a flirt. "Pour s'amuser" was the motto of her life. For this she got thoroughly well rated.

"It was shameful, it was disgusting, it was infamous."

"Had she no principle, no delicacy? no, none."

They did not know her inner life: the wretchedness of the place called her "*home*:" the eternal falseness, intrigue, professional jealousy, scheming, contriving, negotiating, that was going on in Half-Moon Street. She flew to society, to amusement, and admiration, and "flirtation," to save herself from desperation. Without such excitement she felt she should have gone mad, perhaps have destroyed herself.

Of these feelings the looking-on world knew nothing. He or she saw a tall, commanding, haughty-looking beauty patronized by the Duchess of S—— and the Marchioness of A——. They saw her petted, admired, sought after, and having shoals of people anxious to obtain her for their concerts and parties, because she was known to be in favour at S—— House.

They beheld antique Barons of diplomatic fame pay her court, and carriages with coronets

on the panels rein-up at her door to drop bouquets or pay complimentary attentions. How could the "whirling-whirlpool world" (as some one has sublimely called it) be expected to regard this girl except as a butterfly of fashion? or to suppose that she was a flirt and an adventuress by force of circumstance; that she had no "home," and therefore was a wanderer in society, seeking rest and finding none.

True to the instincts of their nature, the Creevys had shown themselves ready to barter Clara Harcourt for any "eligible offer." She could only be regarded as an expensive luxury, because any one who married her would have been obliged to make compensation to her proprietors. They might have been reconciled to the separation, but only for a heavy consideration.

Among the crowd of flatterers and admirers who welcomed Clara on her *début* was the young Earl of Wolverhampton, some few years her senior. She was nineteen, he twenty-four. His attentions were most marked and most constant. He was allowed to visit in Half-Moon Street, and took constant advantage of the permission. The clever Creevys thought that they were about to

negotiate a splendid matrimonial sale, and in order to insure it, threw the girl of nineteen as much as possible in the way of the Earl of twenty-four. The consequences were what might have been expected. His Lordship was joked and envied by his friends at his clubs. "Lucky dog" sounded in his ears, and he awoke to find himself famous for the hopeful prospects of *his* "gallantry."

To make Clara his wife had never remotely entered the brain of this noble Earl, neither had any thought of shame.

His Lordship took the gifts the gods provided him, without any particular concern as to how they might come or how they might go. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof whenever the evil arrived; but until it did, no fore-shadows darkened his path, nor did he ever dream of anticipating evil or meeting it half way.

He was weak, vain, foolish, but not at heart a bad man. On awakening therefore, tardily, to a sense of the truth, and of the manner in which the fair fame of Clara Harcourt was being sacrificed on the altar of his vanity, the Earl was high-minded and upright enough to do at once what

he had better have done long before. The sudden desire

‘to wander far away,’

On from island unto island at the gateways of the day,”

seized upon his imagination. He felt that his absence would be real kindness to the girl whom it was abhorrent to his nature to injure.

With the favour Clara had shown him he had been flattered; with her beauty he had been fascinated; and to tear himself away from a pretty woman who had become a part of his routine of life would be a desperate struggle as well as a great embarrassment, if he remained in London. He had no reason to quarrel with her; none to cut her acquaintance. In fact, the only way to resolve the difficulty which presented itself to his mind was to run away from it.

No doubt the beautiful Cantatrice would think him rude and unfeeling and ungentlemanly. Better she should think thus, than suspect him of having cherished any dishonourable intentions. He ran away accordingly.

A morning or two afterwards the column of “*Haut Ton*” in the fashionable journals announced among arrivals and departures, “The

Earl of Wolverhampton, for Egypt and the East." On the day of the announcement, about the hour of five P. M., a certain bay-window in St James's Street famous for the mastication of tooth-picks and the circulation of scandal, was crowded with an eager throng of fashionable speculators upon the reasons for Wolverhampton's bolt. The prevailing opinion was that he had "gone off with the singing girl." No other solution of the enigma presented itself. But even this idea was shortly afterwards dissipated, when a man, bound in boards, passing up the street, exhibited a large placard to public gaze, announcing a concert for that evening at the Hanover Square Rooms; and in large letters, "Miss Clara Harcourt will sing," &c.

The placard did its work, and contributed largely to the treasury of the enterprising caterer for the public, who gave the concert. The afternoon, which had been passed in curious speculation at the club, had been a period of misery, the misery of wounded pride, to Clara, exasperated by spitefully reproachful remarks from Mrs Montgomery. The angler who has angled for many hours and successfully hooked a splendid salmon, and played with him down stream until he thinks

his victim is pretty well exhausted and the landing-net may be brought into use, sees him give a sudden splash and snap the line and make away, is not much in a humour to be taunted with his want of skill in the very moment of his mortification and loss! Neither was Clara capable of enduring the cruel taunts of Madame on the day when she learnt to her amazement that Lord Wolverhampton had snapt the cord with which she fondly thought she was about to draw him into the landing-net of a proposal!

Whatever sorrow or suffering she might have experienced in silence and solitude, was smothered by the passionate indignation which those unmerited taunts raised in her breast. The woman's vulgarity excited her to such a pitch that in her heart she proudly resolved that no living eye should ever see on her face a symptom of sorrow or regret. The critics of the *Times* and the *Athenæum* proclaimed that Miss Harcourt never sang more superbly than at the concert of that evening; and this critical opinion perfectly harmonized with the sentiments of the kid-gloved clubmen, who attended from curiosity, and listened with admiration.



CHAPTER XIV.

APARTMENTS IN HAMPTON COURT PALACE.



Two females sat in a remarkably pleasant chamber lighted by one large window which enlivened it with a luxuriant prospect over the Thames. It was in every respect a charming room, furnished in excellent taste, with nothing rococo. There was no gaudy rubbish scattered about, no worthless veneer and cheap gilding, no clumsy imitation antique; in short, no vestige either of Moor Fields or of Wardour Street.

Very few sitting-rooms are now to be met with that do not display either absurd pretension or vitiated taste, the apartment being an elaborate attempt at luxury, or else an old curiosity shop. Gaudy Axminster carpets and rugs, heavy gorgeous curtains surmounted by a heavy gorgeous

cornice, every possible variety of uncomfortable chairs, two or three tables that are used only for a bazaar display of articles no sensible person would think of purchasing, and a medley of meretricious pictures, make up the furnishing indulged in by a considerable number of our modern genteel families.

Bad as this combination is however, it is better than the style in favour with another class, an affectation of mediæval fashions, where things ugly, coarse, and *outré* are brought together. Monstrosities in form and extravagances in colour meet you wherever you turn ; chairs you cannot sit upon, tables that will not be moved, pictures that frighten you, and other objects of “*vertu*” that ought to be put behind the fire, are precious in the eyes of many who affect a taste for the antique, while exhibiting no true appreciation of the really Beautiful in the antique.

In the chamber here attempted to be described there was neither modern frivolity nor ancient grotesqueness. It contained nothing either very new or very old. The pretty pair of cabinets that stood against the wainscot with their charming pastoral pictures from the pencil of Lancret,

were certainly not of the nineteenth century, nor were they of English manufacture; and the ormolu and tortoiseshell corner cupboard (where within its plate-glass divisions, choice specimens of Dresden, Sèvres, and Wedgwood stood in the prettiest possible groups, was as certainly not *renaissance*, nor even Parisian), for it had been bought in Oxford Street, and was the work of a London mechanic.

The carpet was Brussels of a quiet pattern, with which the rug corresponded. Handsome lace curtains were elegantly draped at the window, a large mirror filled the space over the chimney, except a narrow margin on each side, where shelves covered with purple velvet contained valuable examples of Nankin and Japan china tea-cups and saucers; while the slab over the fireplace, concealed by velvet of the same colour with a gold border, supported several figures and groups in old Chelsea of singular beauty and rarity.

The pictures with which the old panelling of the room was literally decorated, consisted entirely of portraits and miniatures. The former comprised the full-length of a General Officer by

Sir Thomas Lawrence, and another canvas of smaller size contained two female heads by the same graceful pencil,—sisters, unquestionably; and it was quite as evident that they must have been in the possession of personal attractions worthy of sitting to such an artist. One was a few years younger than the other, whose earnest thoughtful brow contrasted well with the tender confiding glance of her junior.

The miniatures represented both sexes with tolerable impartiality—with a few children, all members of the same family, or else dear, departed friends. Some were still bright and pure in the flesh tints; but in others the colour had faded from age or want of skill in the limner. The worn gold frames exhibited signs of age, but they were only additional proofs of the tender estimation in which the originals were held. Everything around testified not only to a woman's taste, but to a taste of more than ordinary purity—possessed by a mind as far removed from sympathy with the shams as with the cant of art, one that had as little inclination for Pre-Raphaelite eccentricities, as for insipid pictures of singing charity

girls or ecstatic little boys in immaculate surplices and picturesque heads of hair.

The mistress of this chamber sat back in a well-cushioned, capacious chair, covered with French chintz, engaged upon some useful feminine employment with her needle, for she was never to be caught at any of those make-believes of industry and excuses for wasting time, wool-work and hole-sewing, with which so many of her female contemporaries were content to waste away a large portion of every four-and-twenty hours.

She was not alone. At a table, a little distance from her, sat another lady, engaged in writing. There was a marked difference in their ages. They personified the morning and noontide of womanly life. The younger was in the full enjoyment of its sunrise; in the elder, the rays were tempered, the heat had abated, the light was just beginning to fade. The woman had hardly got clear of her girl-hood, the matron had as yet escaped the penalties of age.

The occupants of the room were the Hon. Cecilia Lawson and Mabel Massey. The former was its tenant. She was in possession of four or

five other apartments adjoining, in acknowledgment by the Crown of the military services of her brother, for she was one of the favoured few for whom gratuitous tenements are provided in Hampton Court Palace.

And a very desirable residence it was; at least Miss Lawson had skilfully made the most of its capacity for comfort, and the least of its evils, reversing the plan adopted by certain of her fellow-lodgers, whom the Lord Chamberlain found great difficulty in satisfying.

Mabel (in a well-fitting dress of dark material relieved by a worked collar and cuffs, her bright hair hanging round her bright face like the nimbus in a mediæval picture that distinguishes a saint) continued to write. She wore no ornament but a fine gold chain round her neck. It was easy to see by the form of the paper upon her rosewood desk that she was inditing a letter, and by the expression that made her face so radiant, it was equally clear that she was much interested in its composition.

Was it a love-letter? Judging from ordinary instances of tender epistolary manufacture by young ladies, this might be more than doubtful;

since a fair scribe seldom reconciles herself to carrying on her private correspondence except with the greatest possible degree of privacy. To do anything of the kind, with the knowledge or sanction of parents or guardians, would apparently deprive it of more than half its interest. With a great number, even concealment does not give the affair sufficient zest, it must be accompanied by a large admixture of dissimulation.

Miss Massey was writing openly, close to her protectress and instructress. The elder lady could with very little difficulty have read every sentence as fast as it was penned had she desired to do so; but when she raised her eyes from her work it was not on the writing but on the writer they rested. Now and then she looked at the ingenuous happy face with a smile of perfect content. There beamed the mind of the letter-writer, and she knew that she need not look elsewhere for her thoughts.

Mabel wrote on, covering page after page, quite unconscious of the affectionate scrutiny she was undergoing, quite as unaware of the affectionate memories she was exciting, for while the romance of the youthful beauty was in the future,

there was evidently one equally brilliant for her senior in the past. As the observer noted the warm flush, the tender smile, and the sparkling eye, could she not recall a time when *her* cheek crimsoned, her smile glowed, and her eyes became more lustrous while striving to place on paper the passionate feelings that filled her heart? She did recall the time, but a shadow fell upon her spirit, and the sadness of an untold sorrow weighed heavily upon her soul.

With a strong effort, with an effort that only a strong-hearted woman can make upon such emergencies, Miss Lawson cast from her the painful recollection, and concentrated her attention upon her work. She sewed with increased expedition, but the implement of the ready writer seemed quicker even than that of the ready worker.

Could the former be writing a love-letter? It might be. She was quite an exceptional young lady; could never be brought to degrade herself by the practice of deceit, would neither tell a lie nor act a lie, and as for the harmless popular recreation of dissimulation towards parents and guardians, Mabel would have recoiled with horror at the mere idea of such perfidy.

It was not at all unlikely that perfect confidence existed between teacher and pupil, and then of course it became the most natural thing in the world for the one to be writing a love-letter with the cognizance, indeed with the approval, of the other.

If the epistle was intended for Blount Tempest, his college career might be rendered doubly brilliant by his knowledge of the eloquent looks of his correspondent, for surely her heart was borne upon her pen. A happy man would that Gentleman Commoner have been, could he have got some demoniacally clever Asmodeus to make a clear vista for him between Oxford and Hampton Court, and to have shown him the object of so many Petrarchan sonnets, sitting at that little rose-wood desk placing line after line upon delicate note-paper in a clear Italian hand, and looking during the production of these admirable thoughts as if all the felicity of her young and innocent life was in her employment.

“Mabel, my love, you are writing a very long letter.”

Miss Lawson made this remark without removing her eyes from her work.

“Yes, dear Miss Lawson,” replied her companion in a cheerful voice, “it is long, but Papa likes me to write long letters.”

After all, the young lady was not writing a love-letter. It was merely a communication from Miss Lawson’s pupil to her guardian—quite a common-place thing, not for a moment to be compared to those specimens of tenderness that are written in a multitude of instances, it is to be feared, to most unworthy correspondents.

“Now I have finished,” she presently added, taking up the sheets and putting them together with a look of buoyant gratification, “and you shall hear what I have written.”

“No, my dear,” replied the elder lady, “what you write to Colonel Massey should be for his eye alone.”

“I could never have secrets from you, dear Miss Lawson, so please to give an attentive audience to my humble epistolary powers. I am sure Papa would be all the better pleased were he to know that you honoured my composition with a hearing before permitting me to send it to the post.”

“Do as you like, my dear. If Colonel Massey

has no objection, I do not see that I can have any."

The young lady did not wait for further comment. Having placed the sheets in the order in which they were written, she commenced reading.

"Hampton Court Palace.

"Dear Papa,

"It would be difficult to say anything in a letter which I have not repeated many times. Were I to express my feelings towards you I could scarcely help such repetitions. I am afraid I do not alter at all, certainly not as your daughter; therefore there can be very little of that variety in me which is said to be the chief charm in modern *belles*. As you do not complain of me, darling Papa, I am content to go on in my ordinary way, loving you and dear Miss Lawson every day, month, and year the same, and never growing tired of confessing my obligations to both.

"Of course I should be set down as dreadfully tiresome, if not intolerably stupid, by persons who are only to be satisfied with perpetual change. These exacting people have their minds filled with images of heroines, who do every-

thing, talk everything, look everything, feminine chameleons, who are every colour in the rainbow, and are seldom of one hue long enough to be successfully photographed.

“You know that I have no ambition of being a heroine, so you will be kind enough not to expect me to vary in any degree from what I was when I wrote last, and dear Miss Lawson seems to be equally content with my sameness. Both of you assist as much as you can in spoiling me for all heroine-like purposes, so please not to feel more bored than you can help if you find my pen going over the familiar track; the well-used path which your unambitious, faithful Mabel has taken from her childhood.

“You ask me, darling Papa, if I am happy here. I should be very ungrateful were I not happy with dear Miss Lawson; for, as you know very well, she is as anxious to prevent my feeling a moment’s unhappiness as she is to promote my improvement; but though Hampton Court is very beautiful, and every one in it appears very nice, after all it is not dear Durham-Massey; and all the good people within its wide circumference are far from reconciling me to the absence of one

good, kind, thoughtful Papa, who made the old home so delightful to his poor Mabel.

“Even in the days long ago, when there existed a dearer claim on your paternal solicitude, how well do I remember with what liberality you shared your affection between us !

“Dear Papa, I strive to make my affection equal to what you used to enjoy from the two grateful natures, who felt that they could not appreciate your goodness sufficiently, so that you may not miss our darling Willoughby too much ; but I am quite aware how incompetent I am to the task. I am far from wishing you to forget him, I know by my own feelings that this would be impossible ; but I should be very glad, very glad indeed, if I could make you more cheerful than I am afraid you are while living alone at Durham-Massey.

“You are kind enough to say that you miss me very much. I am so sorry I cannot come and cheer you ; but Miss Lawson says that I am making such progress under my several masters, that next year, or the year after at furthest, she thinks that I shall be quite finished. Then you know I can come and keep house for you, sing to you, play to you, talk all kinds of

girlish trifling, ride with you, walk with you, never let you remain alone, never allow you to be dull. Won't this be nice? Dear Papa, you shall be happy once more if your poor Mabel can make you so. And I know that I shall be happy, happier, at least, than I have ever been since I lost dear, noble Willoughby.

“You ask me to describe the sort of life I am living and the kind of people with whom I associate. Miss Lawson parcels out the day so that there is a proper interchange of leisure and study. I rise early and devote an hour to the piano. When I have conquered the difficulties of Chopin, or Beethoven, or Mendelssohn, or any other maestro I am obliged to have literally at my fingers' ends, I am called to breakfast, and it is not Miss Lawson's fault if I do not do justice to that pleasant meal. Then I generally take a walk with her in the Palace gardens or the park, or along the banks of the river by Moulsey, and the Hurst, where David Garrick used to play at Golf.

“I read Schiller with Herr Schwartz, and Dante with Signor Veroni, the former a portly florid Hanoverian professor with a very thick moustache and a particularly wild head of hair;

the latter a dark-complexioned, black-bearded Roman, with restless flashing eyes, that make me imagine him to be some prodigious conspirator or Jesuit of the deepest dye; but the poor man is really quite harmless; in truth, he does not seem to have an idea out of the Divine Comedy.

“On alternate days I have my harp, piano-forte, and singing masters or mistresses; the drawing-master also claims his portion of my time. This completes my course with “professors,” other studies being pursued under the superintendence of Miss Lawson. I sometimes have a charming row on the river, or a ride through this picturesque neighbourhood, in a pretty little pony-carriage which Miss Lawson keeps.

“In the evening we have company, or visit one or other of the people living with us in the Palace, with whom we have formed an acquaintance. Shall I describe you one or two of our Palace Society? Well, to begin; there is the Chaplain, who has the spiritual charge of the entire establishment, the Rev. Cecil Mildmay, an exceedingly fair-complexioned, fair-haired, fair-spoken gentleman, very tranquil in his manners, and apparently only particular in the set of his

cravat, which always betrays marks of having been the result of innumerable failures to effect a satisfactory tie. The hardest heart could scarcely refuse to soften on noticing the great pains the reverend gentleman must have taken to mar the skill of his laundress.

“Then there is the Dowager Lady Dewlap, a relic of the Court of the Prince Regent, who always goes out of an evening with ostrich feathers in her head, and in a dress that was in fashion about the period of the visit of the Allied Sovereigns. Her ladyship is a wonderful gossip, but would not condescend to discuss scandal more recent than the death of the Princess Charlotte.

“How you would smile if you could see the Honourable Belinda Carruthers and Miss Lavinia Fotheringay, both unappreciated blessings, they being maiden ladies, a little, I am afraid, on the shady side of forty; but, according to their own account (in which they support each other with remarkable fidelity), there never existed two women so generally admired by the other sex. They are both tall and slender, with aquiline noses and high cheek-bones, yet are not at all alike,—the Honourable Belinda being a blonde with light

hair, Miss Lavinia a brunette with raven tresses.

“I am greatly diverted by a Mrs ‘Admiral’ Boyle (she always calls herself ‘Mrs Admiral’), a stout little lady with awfully good spirits, who seems, however, to talk, laugh, eat, drink, sleep, with no other object than to play at whist. The good old soul is only capable of entertaining one idea, and that is comprised in the word—Rubber. From her rising, which is somewhere about noon, to her setting, which is usually towards day-break, her attention seems to be absorbed with games, past, present, and to come. Military veterans are said to fight their battles o’er again. Mrs Admiral Boyle is content to repeat her card-playing triumphs. Her pleasantest memories are based upon winning the odd trick, and her most agreeable associations connected with holding four by honours.

“We have cultivated a bowing acquaintance with a few more of the residents, mostly ladies, by the way, for this enchanted castle, or rather Palace, seems to have been selected by way of experiment on the sociability of our sex; but perhaps you will think that I have introduced you

to enough for the present. Miss Lawson is popular, particularly with old Lady Dewlap, who remembers her grandmother dancing at a birthday at St James's in the time of Queen Charlotte.

“As for me, I am held in tolerable favour. Indeed, the Honourable Belinda acknowledged that if I had a little more *ton* I might do very well at Court; and Miss Lavinia endorsed this flattering opinion with her valuable approval, adding confidentially that the officers of the Tenth Hussars, with whom she had been a toast for three successive seasons, without a rival, disliked hair like mine. She kindly suggested having my head shaved, and my wearing a wig as black as her own. Of course I was grateful, but I am not in a hurry to gratify the fastidious taste of the officers of the Tenth. I think that I have heard some one admire my poor curls who is a great deal more easy to please.

“I hope when you come to town, dear Papa, you will lose no time in finding your way here. Of course you know all about the place, but it would be a very great gratification to me to show you my favourite haunts. We have a most charm-

ing view (from the window of the room in which I am writing) of part of the Palace gardens and the river, and all the neighbourhood is putting forth its greatest attractions. I am sure you will be pleased with everything, and I hope that the improvement I have made will insure your being pleased with me.

“Remember me to Sir Nigel, and please tell me how all my pets are getting on in my absence. I know that they will not be neglected by the kind, dear Papa, to whom I am indebted for them. I shall be so happy when I can get back to dear Durham-Massey, and see that you are properly cared for. Nevertheless, I will wait patiently, and try to make as much progress in my studies as will the better enable me to be all you desire as a daughter.

“Dear Papa, accept the devotion of my loving and faithful heart, and believe me to remain

“Ever your affectionate

MABEL MASSEY.”

“Now I have only got the postscript,” said the reader, apologetically.

“Ah, but the postscript to a lady’s letter, you know,” replied the other, “ought to contain the real meaning of the letter.”

“It is not the case in this instance,” added her pupil.

The elder lady looked a little incredulous. The perusal continued,—

“P.S. Please to let the Widow Jones have some new flannel, as she suffers much from the rheumatism.”

The reader began to fold her letter.

“Is that all, Mabel?”

“Yes, Miss Lawson.”

The latter regarded her with a look of disappointment.

“But you’ve said nothing about Blount Tempest.”

“Oh haven’t I?” was the reply, as the young lady proceeded to place the folded paper in an envelope. “I don’t see that in writing to Papa it is necessary that I should mention Blount. We know that he is at College, and I suppose he is very well, as in his last letter he said nothing to the contrary.”

Miss Lawson regarded her companion with an

expression of mystification, but the latter wrote the address without betraying the slightest interest in the absent Collegian.

“Blount was the dearest friend of poor Willoughby,” observed the elder lady; “the Colonel takes a great interest in him, partly on that account, I think, partly because he is Sir Nigel’s heir, and, to a considerable extent also, because he is a fine, manly fellow.”

Mabel looked up with quickening intelligence.

“Yes, I know he was loved by darling Willoughby, and I have always liked him in consequence; but Papa, of course, hears all about him from Sir Nigel. I could not tell him anything about Blount.”

Miss Lawson resumed her work, but there was a look of dissatisfaction impressed upon her features as she plied her needle. Blount Tempest was a great favourite with her, and she was not pleased to find that he was held in so little estimation, in a quarter where, as she perhaps was aware, he desired to be particularly esteemed.

Her regrets were abruptly put an end to by the entrance of a little elderly woman in a black dress, a confidential servant, bearing a letter on a

salver. Her aspect was somewhat stolid, but there was a twinkle in the grey eyes that redeemed the coarse features and made the round rough face pleasant to look upon.

"Letter for Miss Massey, just brought by the post-man," she said.

"Oh, it's from Papa!" exclaimed Mabel, her features radiant with animation as she recognized the hand-writing.

"Post-man insisted it was a love-letter," observed the old dame with a suggestive shake of her head. "But I told him as no such rubbish ever came to my ladies."

"I hope that nothing unpleasant has happened," remarked Miss Lawson.

Her pupil clapped her hands and looked transported with delight, as soon as she had mastered the contents.

"Oh no—such good news, dear Miss Lawson!" she presently exclaimed, "such agreeable news! I could not have anticipated anything half so pleasant. Only think, Papa and Sir Nigel are going to the Oxford Commemoration, and they propose coming up to town, in order to take us with them."

"What a gratification that will be to Blount," said the elder lady, considerately.

"To be sure it will, and to Papa too, and to dear Sir Nigel, and to you, I hope, as much as any one."

"Well, if the Colonel and Sir Nigel are coming to visit *my* ladies," observed the housekeeper, apparently more to herself than to any one else, "I must get things ready. Though we can't be as hospitable as at Warfdale Tower or Durham-Massey, we can give them a respectable meal, thank God."

"Yes, Mrs Wilkins," said Mabel joyfully, "Papa and Sir Nigel intend being here in June."

"We must have everything ready for them when they arrive, Mrs Wilkins," added her mistress; "if the hospitality of the Lawsons suffers in your hands, you alone will be to blame."

Mrs Wilkins hurried out of the room, deeply impressed with her responsibility.

"But will not this proposed excursion afford *you* gratification, Mabel?"

"The very greatest gratification possible."

Miss Lawson looked satisfied.

“Oh! shall I not enjoy being with dear Papa?”

This addition to the sentence apparently did not please her quite so well as the preceding portion.

“Oh, shall we not have a happy time of it, dear Miss Lawson? I shall be so impatient, till we get to Oxford! Sir Nigel shall take charge of you, and Papa will take care of me.”

“And is Blount to ramble about by himself? The Colonel intends the visit as a compliment to him; I don’t think he would like Blount to feel slighted.”

The young lady gazed inquiringly into the face of her companion, and did not speak for a few minutes.

“If Papa wishes me to walk with Blount,” she presently said slowly, almost with hesitation, “I will.”

“Of course he will expect you to do so; it would appear an affront to Mr Tempest if you refused his escort to a spectacle in which he is personally interested. I am sure he would feel it deeply.”

“Then I shall walk with him instead of with Papa. I would not offend Blount for worlds, poor dear Willoughby was so fond of him. But then you know I would much rather be with Papa.”

Miss Lawson saw it was useless saying more, and endeavoured to seem satisfied with the case as it stood.





CHAPTER XV.

THE TEMPTER AND THE TEMPTED.



IN the offices of the eminent legal firm of Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg there reigned a remarkable degree of quiet, for the simple reason that there were within—visible or audible—neither lawyers, clients, nor clerks. So completely deserted was the usually stirring place, that the hobady-hoy whose privilege it was to stick a pen behind his ear, to announce visitors, and to spoil excellent foolscap with attempts to write a legal hand while perched on a very tall stool near the outer door, had vacated his pedestal, and was enjoying a slice of hot Yorkshire pudding in a neighbouring by-street.

It was the luncheon hour of the principals and the dinner hour of their dependents. The

highly respectable Mr Probyn had gone to take his basin of soup at the pastry-cook's, the fashionable Mr Digby Shirley was indulging in sandwiches and sherry at the Law Club, and the more practical Mr Trigg was enjoying a mutton-chop and a glass of stout at that celebrated tavern, "The Lord Chancellor's Head." Their clerks were refreshing themselves with viands and drinks of various descriptions, in different places of prandiary resort in the immediate neighbourhood.

Though the outer office was quite deserted, the chambers had not been left entirely tenantless. In one of the inner rooms, approached through hermetically sealed green-baize doors, two persons were absorbed examining some papers which they had just taken out of a japanned deed-case, standing open on the table before them.

It was the usual circular leather-covered piece of furniture, known as a library table, and was covered with the usual little piles of folded endorsed and red-taped papers, with here and there a half-opened parchment showing the bold engrossing of some important word or phrase, one or two law books, and a diary clasped and locked. The further end of the room was filled with book-

cases, crammed with books bound uniformly in law calf. In one corner was a large iron safe, also locked. Round a shelf were ranged a row of japanned boxes inscribed with different names.

Among the most conspicuous were "The Right Honourable the Earl of Wolverhampton," "Sir Nigel Tempest, Bart.," "The Dowager Lady Dewlap." There were several other names of influential personages belonging to the aristocracy, or holding high positions in the mercantile world. It was Mr Probyn's private room, where the papers of the best clients of the firm were carefully preserved, and where the clients themselves were advised, cautioned, encouraged, or remonstrated with in the arrangement of their several affairs.

The two individuals intently engaged in examining the papers out of the box were the clever clerk, Mr Creevy, and that most hopeful articulated clerk, Mr Geoffrey Tempest. The face of the former was a study for a painter. As the man held a document in his hand which he was showing to his companion, the expression was not pleasing. It seemed like a combination of the keenness of the vulture with the cunning of the

fox. The physiognomy of the latter was not more prepossessing at that moment, for it wore a sinister and malicious expression. The glance of the grey eyes was singularly eager, and a smile of satisfaction played about the mouth as if caused by some new prospect of selfish gratification.

The two stood together as if a sense of common interest had suddenly connected them in a closer relationship than any of mere kindred. The elder watched with scrutinizing earnestness the effect of his temptation, very much as Mephistophiles may be supposed to have watched the effect of similar appeals to the easily yielding Faust; indeed, there was a demoniac spirit, half jocular, half sneering, exhibited by the useful servant of Messrs Probyn, Shirley, and Trigg, that was at times very suggestive of the German poet's creation; and as he noticed the signs of the germination of the evil seed he was dexterously sowing, the gleam of triumph that lit up his dark eyes and strongly-marked features made the resemblance closer.

"You see, Mr Tempest," he observed in a kind of respectful, almost coaxing tone, "what a glorious opportunity this discovery offers for

changing your present dependent position for one that would surround you with every luxury."

Geoffrey Tempest did not answer immediately. With the caution of a cunning nature he was weighing the chances of success in the enterprise that had been proposed to him. But the nature with which he had come in contact was far more cunning than his own, and it had resolved that the said enterprise should be undertaken ostensibly for the profit of his young friend, but in a large measure for his own advantage.

"I can understand very well the humiliations you must have been obliged to endure," he added. "They are inseparable from your having the great misfortune of being a younger brother; but with the golden prospect before you which this idea of mine opens, you may laugh at the destiny your friends have arranged for your acceptance."

"Do you think, Mr Creevy, such a plan could be carried out without exciting suspicion?" he inquired.

"Leave that to me," replied his friend, with a sardonic laugh. "I've succeeded in carrying out too many difficult plans to doubt my success in this. Besides, nothing could be more easily

managed. Now just listen to me a few minutes, and I will make you master of all the details. In the first place—”

He was interrupted by a loud voice proceeding from the office. “Ahoy! Ahoy! Anybody aboard?”

The conspirators paused, and listened.

“What cheer, my hearties?” again was shouted. “Is the craft a derelict, as there’s nobody left to keep a look-out?”

“Oh, it’s only a sailor come to the wrong place, with the usual stupidity of Jack ashore,” said Mr Creevy.

Jack ashore, however, did not seem to fancy that he had made any error. It soon became evident that he felt himself the right man in the right place, for instead of continuing to shout, he began to sing. In a voice that was capable of making itself heard in a gale of wind, he commenced,

“Tom Starboard was a lover true,
As brave a tar as ever sail’d;
The duties English seamen do,
Tom did, and never yet had fail’d.”

“The fellow will go, if no notice is taken of

him," observed the law-clerk; which assurance checked his companion's progress to the green-baize door. No notice *was* taken of him; nevertheless he did not go, but presently recommenced shouting:

"What ho, there? Is the watch up the rigging or down in the hold? It must be uncommon safe anchorage hereabouts when you arn't got so much as a loblolly boy to answer a hail."

Having expressed this opinion, the speaker resumed his singing, but with a different tune and words, being now extremely energetic in praise of "The glorious Arethusa!"

"What the deuce are you making such a catterwauling here for?" cried Mr Creevy, bursting through the door of communication.

He beheld a tall, stout man in the blue cloth suit usually worn by the better class of seamen, a little black waterproof hat on his head, a silk handkerchief of the same colour loosely tied with a true-lover's knot round his throat, and his hands in the pockets of his jacket. His face was a jovial, weather-beaten one, the surface of which looked as rough as a melon, but in

colour seemed as if cut out of mahogany. The light that sparkled in the blue eyes was, however, trustworthy evidence of its being a living face, and the silvery streaks visible in the black whiskers that met under the chin as clearly testified to its having a tolerably lengthened acquaintance with human life.

“Catterwauling!” repeated the stranger, indignantly, as he hitched up his trowsers, and endeavoured to steady himself on the flooring of the office. “What do you mean, you son of a grampus?”

“I’ll let you know what I mean, if you don’t make yourself scarce. This isn’t a tap-room in Ratcliff Highway.”

“I knows that well enough, but I arn’t a-going to make myself scarce for you, or a dozen such. Where’s the skipper?”

“There’s no skipper here! What do you mean by asking such absurd questions, you drunken vagabond?”

“Avast there! To be sure I’ve been splicing the main brace wi’ an old messmate as was captain o’ the top, when I was Bosun of the Agamemnon, but I knows a martin spike from

a darning needle as well as you, you swab! Where's the skipper, I say? He knows Jack Laddler. He has the overhauling my claim on the owners of the 'Mary Jane.' "

"Oh, you mean Mr Probyn," replied the other in a milder tone. "He has just stepped out,—gone to the courts at Westminster,—won't be back for a couple of hours."

"Then I'll put in here again," answered the sailor. "I must see the skipper. *He* won't call Jack Laddler, who's ranked A 1. for nigh upon thirty years, a drunken vagabond."

Mr Creevy commenced an apology, but Jack with a contemptuous look turned on his heel, hitched up his trowsers, clapped his hat firmly on his head, made a lurch in the direction of the outer door, and departed, vociferating the praises of the *Arethusa* more lustily than before.

"A queer fellow that!" said Geoffrey Tempest.

"Blundering blockhead!" exclaimed his friend. "I wish he had kept in his vessel, or been shipwrecked in her, or fallen overboard; anything rather than have interrupted me at such a moment. Confound the fellow, here he is again."

Sure enough a strong mellow voice resounded through the next room.

“Ship ahoy! Pipe all hands! Tumble up! Tumble up! Out of your hammock, you lazy beggar of a porpoise, and come on deck.”

Then was added in his singing voice,—

“What cheer, brother, quickly tell!

A friend. The word? ‘Good-night.’ ‘All’s Well!’”

“What do you want now?” angrily demanded Mr Creevy, again rushing through the green door, as the final notes of the well-known melody were swelling forth.

“Mind you tell the skipper as I called.”

The grin on Jack’s well-tanned face as he once more made his exit, after solemnly delivering the foregoing sentence, would have aggravated a less forbearing lawyer’s clerk than the clever Mr Creevy, so there is nothing surprising in that gentleman hurling a hearty imprecation after him. It either fell short of its mark, or was considered too contemptible a missile to deserve notice, for Jack was heard going on his somewhat devious way, singing the glories of the *Arethusa* with a chuckling accompaniment

that gave quite a new character to that stirring song.

“If ever I happen to be engaged against you at the Old Bailey,” muttered Mr Creevy, with a particularly menacing look, “your chance of getting off will be small. Precious small, I think I may say, you impudent old rascal!”

He returned to the inner room in anything but a good humour. Geoffrey Tempest was still poring over the papers, but Creevy’s quick eye detected a peculiar play about the corners of the young man’s mouth, that indicated a sense of humorous enjoyment, the influence of which had superseded even the momentous enterprise his clever friend had been so eloquently recommending to his consideration.

“As I was saying, my dear sir,” he began as soon as he found himself again by the side of his young friend. “May I be nonsuited in every case for which I am concerned,” he added in accents of mingled bitterness and anger, “if that seafaring scoundrel hasn’t come back again.”

Certainly some one was heard in the office.

“I’ll give you in charge of a constable!” shouted Mr Creevy, apparently unable to restrain

his passion, as he once more darted out of the green door. - To his intense astonishment, he nearly ran against the figure of a very handsome man of elegant appearance, rather slim in person, but tall.

When the observer had sufficiently admired the graceful proportions of his form and his fine features, he could not help noticing the colour of his somewhat luxuriant hair, which was almost white, and very delicate and silk-like in appearance. He wore a thick moustache of the same colour on his upper lip, and as the clever law-clerk stopped short in his run to avoid a collision, he raised it with a good-humoured smile, and displayed a remarkably fine set of teeth.

“Beg your pardon, my Lord,” exclaimed Mr Creevy, with ready obsequiousness. “The fact is, there has been a miserable tramp here, whom I have driven away twice, and I thought the fellow had returned.”

“Awfully droll that,” replied the distinguished visitor. “And I quite appreciate the compliment, I assure you—aw! I have come to town for a day or two, being about to start to Norway with a few fellows for some salmon fish-

ing. I wanted to see Probyn, is Probyn visible?"

His Lordship was most obligingly told that Mr Probyn had gone out for his luncheon, would be sure to return in half an hour, would be greatly vexed to find that his Lordship had called in his absence; with a great deal more to the same soothing effect, ending with a most touching appeal to the distinguished visitor to repeat his call at his Lordship's earliest possible convenience.

In answer, his Lordship merely elevated his bushy moustache, nodded, and took his departure.

"Who was that?" asked Geoffrey Tempest. "A tremendous swell whoever he is."

"Yes, a tip-top sawyer even among our most fashionable exquisites," replied Mr Creevy. "That is Lord Wolverhampton."

"The deuce!" cried the young gentleman, who had lately put forth pretensions to fashion in the way of cut-away coats, "fast" trowsers, and waistcoats of a "loud" pattern, a taste, by the way, he had copied from his present associate, who, when not in Lincoln's Inn, patronized rather

a flashy style of dress. "So that was the aristocratic lover of the beautiful Clara!"

Mr Creevy looked severe, looked virtuously severe. No heavy father in a thrilling domestic drama could have looked more severe than he did at that moment.

"Between you and I, Mr Tempest," observed that gentleman mildly, "I think Miss Clara Harcourt well rid of him. No doubt the position of Countess of Wolverhampton ought to have satisfied her ambition, but she is as superior to her sex for disinterestedness as for loveliness. Her fancy is not to be captivated by a title. She will only give her hand where she gives her heart, and if I do not mistake the signs I have observed of her preference, that priceless gift might become the prize of a certain friend of mine, whose modesty is at present the obstacle to his success."

Mr Geoffrey Tempest was aware of an unusual warmth in his face, for he was not accustomed to blushing, and of a rather agreeable sensation about the region of his heart; hitherto he had remained in ignorance of possess-

ing such an organ. He had greatly admired the accomplished young lady, who was so very decided an attraction in a certain establishment in Half-Moon Street. Her singing had charmed him; he had listened to her playing with more gratification than he had derived from any other performer; but her looks, her smiles, her winning manners, her agreeable conversation, had made a sensible impression upon his feelings. He very much liked the idea of her being favourably disposed towards him.

Mr Creevy observed this, and immediately prepared to follow up his advantage.

“Now suppose, my dear sir,” he said in a very persuasive tone, “suppose this young lady, in addition to her personal attractions, were, through some unexpected turn in fortune’s wheel, to become the possessor of a noble estate, I venture to express my opinion as a friend, that she would be a most desirable wife.”

Mr Geoffrey Tempest laughed. He was in no hurry to get married, but a handsome girl with a handsome fortune might, he acknowledged to himself, entice him into matrimony.

“All I can say on so interesting a point at

present, is," added the observant Creevy, "that if you will place yourself entirely in my hands and be guided by me exclusively, I will undertake to secure for you the hand of Clara Harcourt with an annual income at least equal to the rental of the Durham-Massey estate."

Mr Geoffrey Tempest seemed to look at the glittering bait with something like the sense of fascination small birds are said to feel when under the glance of a serpent. His heart fluttered a little, but he made no outward demonstration of his feelings, except by a certain glistening in his cold, selfish, grey eyes, which betrayed the inward satisfaction the contemplated prospect afforded him.

He was perfectly aware of the illegality of the proceedings that had been recommended to him. The little time he had been in a lawyer's office had given him some insight into the principles of common law in dealing with property, but the young gentleman had already so familiarized his mind with suggestions of self-interest that they put good principles completely in the background. So when this unromantic Faust met with this rather common-place Mephistophiles in-

clined to turn his pliability to evil to account, he was found ready to meet him half-way if he could thereby secure two advantages—his interest and his revenge. In the former, he would have grasped at everything that lay in his way; in the latter, he was as willing to sacrifice everybody that stood in his way.

“These people I am pretty certain I can secure,” added Mr Creevy, pointing to two names in a document he had taken up. “I think I know where to find them, and they will prove invaluable agents. Of course it must be made worth their while to assist us, but leave that to me. I am certain of accomplishing that part of the business without assistance. In our profession it is necessary to be able to manage all sorts of characters, and in that kind of management I flatter myself I have no superior.

“But—” here he laid hold of a flashy-looking watch-chain festooned about his waistcoat, and looked at his watch—“it is almost time for Mr Probyn’s return, and we must avoid exciting suspicion, particularly in the mind of Trigg. There are two men in this office whom it would be difficult to deceive when once their attention

had been roused. Trigg is one, and the other is, Methusaleh Whiffler, as we sometimes call our managing clerk in Chancery. It would not be easy to hood-wink him if he were determined to see his way. With proper caution, however, the plan is sure to succeed. We can confer further and more securely on the affair at my house, where Mrs Montgomery and Miss Harcourt will be most happy to see you."

Geoffrey accepted the invitation and acceded to the arrangement; the deeds were put back into the case, and the case returned to its ordinary position. The clever Creevy gave a glance at the table to see that none of Mr Probyn's papers had been displaced, and returned to the office, closing the green-baize door carefully behind him.

Scarcely had this been done, when the hobadychoy in trowsers and sleeves a couple of inches too short for him, came in, looking as innocent of pudding as of guile, and perched his long legs on his accustomed stool. He seemed surprised to find that the articulated pupil and Mr Creevy had returned to their posts. The latter at once began to address him in energetic language as to the misdemeanor he had committed in overstaying his

time nearly half a minute; so the poor fellow set himself to the pursuit of his duties without venturing to raise his eyes from his desk.

Presently the more important members of the establishment began to re-assemble—the small salaries first. The remarkable white head of the Chancery clerk had scarcely become visible within the railings of his compartment, when the active little junior partner came bustling in, full of orders for everybody, and taking a business-like glance at what all were about, that included even the round text of the now extremely diligent proprietor of the over-grown clothing. Then he passed to his private room.

Next came the fussy Mr Digby Shirley, looking as if the existence of the firm depended on his exertions, yet endeavouring to maintain an air of grandeur calculated to convince genteel clients that though his body was in Lincoln's Inn, his soul was in Belgravia. He had a great number of apparently important questions to ask, then he also passed into his apartment.

Lastly, came the respectable Mr Probyn, but not alone. He was accompanied by Lord Wolverhampton, who was telling some remark-

ably good joke. Both were evidently highly amused. No doubt it is quite proper that a thriving lawyer should find entertainment in a wealthy client. However this may be, it is a fact that the head of the eminent legal firm in Lincoln's Inn laughed heartily all through the office; and until the green-baize doors prevented any further evidence of his mirth becoming cognizable to his clerks.

The clever Mr Creevy did not look up to ascertain the cause of his principal's good humour, or evince the slightest surprise at the distinguished client's facetiousness. Ostensibly he was deeply engaged in deciphering some shorthand notes he had written in his private memorandum-book respecting certain affidavits that it was necessary he should prepare, in which a large amount of very hard swearing was to form a principal ingredient; in reality, he was calculating the profit that ought to accrue to him through the discovery he had made in the family papers he had been examining.

The clever fellow saw before him a handsome competence for life, and resolved not to permit any foolish scruples, even should such unfamiliar

visitants trouble him, to stand in the way of that most desirable object of his ambition. For, to say no more than the truth, even the establishment in Half-Moon Street did not satisfy his desires. His professional prospects in that direction failed at present to present such solid advantages as he aspired to possess, and the Old Bailey was beginning to fail in its attraction. His active mind required a new field of enterprise, and he had found one that offered abundant scope for the profitable exercise of its peculiar talent. He presently shut up the note-book with the determination of developing its resources.

Neither did Geoffrey Tempest exhibit any marked interest in the source of Mr Probyn's good humour. The recent discovery, and the proposition that had come with it, had set him thinking. While very carefully writing in bold characters "This Indenture," he had sunk his ingenious mind to the lowest level of selfishness. Nothing could have appealed more strongly to such a nature as his than the temptation that had been artfully put in his way. He could not resist succumbing to it. Even the grave mischief to others which it was sure to produce had its re-

commendation, and he smiled maliciously as he thought of that contingency.

He had the greatest confidence in the cleverness of his colleague, and was not without a certain reliance in his own. If Creevy went too far, he could draw back (for he should refrain from committing himself),—take any advantage, but avoid the slightest risk. He was too wide awake, the young gentleman flattered himself, to put his arm further out than he could withdraw it with comfort.

Clara too, he was willing to allow, with a large unencumbered estate, was a prize worth having, even if a little risk in gaining it should be unavoidable, but he would see his way clearly before he gave his final decision. So when the “e” of “Indenture” had been decorated with a flourish he resolved to join Creevy in a bowl of punch in the evening, and with such very unreliable spectacles to look thoroughly into the affair.





CHAPTER XVI.

MUSIC AND CARDS.

THE HON. CECILIA LAWSON'S suite of apartments in the Cardinal's magnificent residence consisted of a kitchen, four bed-rooms, and a drawing-room. Much did she desire to have a dining-room in addition, but in this she was merely one of a large number of residents who wished for more accommodation than they could obtain.

The Lord Chamberlain would have had his time engrossed by the persons placed under his supervision had he attempted to satisfy every want of every tenant; for some could not be reconciled to their kitchen, especially if it happened to be, as was often the case, at an inconvenient distance from the eating-rooms; some could not be content

with a bed-chamber unless it had a particular aspect; a few were indignant at not having a bath-room, and several demanded a boudoir.

But the evil which pressed most severely upon Miss Lawson was her inability to secure both a dining and a drawing-room. It was a grievance to be obliged to receive evening company with the smell of the dinner filling an apartment; equally intolerable was it to be obliged to have their meals in a room they had taxed their resources to transform from a bed-room for the nonce into a *salle à manger*.

Miss Lawson had fared no better than many of her neighbours in this respect, but had learnt to be content with her limited suite of apartments, the handsomest of which—the one already described—she had fitted up as a reception-room when she chose to entertain her friends, and used as breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper-room for herself and pupil when company was not expected.

On a particular evening, more than usual care was taken to make this room as like a drawing-room as it could be made. The piano was open, the harp uncovered, the card-tables were ready

with wax-lights in the silver candlesticks, and the handsome little chandelier was glittering with prismatic rays. The books were on their shelves, the flowers in their vases, and the rare China and the charming miniatures were as bright as argant lamps and wax-candles could make them.

Mrs Wilkins too was brightened up for the occasion. The twinkle in her queer little eyes caused her somewhat inexpressive features to look astonishingly cordial, and her black silk dress and matronly cap trimmed with smart pink ribbon (her unvarying company costume), invested her with an amount of respectability that would have conferred credit on the establishment even of the great Cardinal himself.

Round a card-table in the aforesaid drawing-room were grouped four females, each too thoroughly individualized to be mistaken for anybody else. The white plume in her head that distinguished the senior of the party, quite as much as her low-bodied amber satin dress, pointed her out as the Dowager Lady Dewlap. Her complexion, notwithstanding the rouge that bloomed upon the surface of her pendulous cheeks, very much resembled that of an Egyptian mum-

my, and her shrivelled hands and arms helped to support the comparison.

On the other side appeared the Hon. Belinda Carruthers, her whitey-brown head-gear encircled with velvet bands that, aided by a muslin frock with crimson sash, rendered her pale complexion more unhealthy than usual. She was with considerable animation referring to a memorable incident in her fashionable career, across the table, to her bosom friend, Miss Lavinia Fotheringay, who, in a blue skirt and velvet body, smiled and simpered her concurrence.

Opposite to her, in a cashmere turban and black satin robe, sat the plump figure of "Mrs Admiral" Boyle, her black sharp eyes glancing from under her thick black eye-brows, at everything and everybody, with a half jocose expression, that lent a peculiar vivacity to her fat cheeks and triple chin, and gave the large cameo brooch and the thick gold chain that rested upon her capacious neck and bosom a particularly uneasy seat.

The fact was, Mrs Admiral Boyle was in her element. She vegetated during that portion of the day in which she was removed from the green

baize that formed the surface of a certain description of table; but she lived with an intense enjoyment of life when, having cut for partners and for deal, she saw her share of the cards falling before her.

But it was scarcely possible to exceed her sense of enjoyment when she was dealing; her bright black eyes flashed, and her fat cheeks dimpled from excess of satisfaction. It was only when gaining the odd trick after a critical struggle, that her pleasure became more evident. Then her jovial physiognomy shone like that of a Bacchante, and her restless brooch and chain seemed in a state of chronic convulsions.

Mrs Admiral Boyle was now dealing, and her cashmere turban was apparently lifted considerably above its ordinary level by the elevation of the wearer's spirits. The Hon. Belinda was her partner, sitting opposite to her, trying hard to reciprocate her fat friend's satisfaction, but looking like a badly-modelled figure of the Queen of Scots in a wax-work exhibition at a country-fair, with a faded complexion and an unnatural smile.

"This reminds me, my dear," said the old

lady with an unctuous chuckle, as she distributed the pack, "of a rubber I once played with the Princess Romboffski against Metternich and Talleyrand during the first occupation of Paris by the Allies. It was immensely diverting, for the poor Princess did not know in the least what to do, and as she understood no language but Russian, I could not very easily direct her. But would you believe me, my dear, her Highness, if she did not know how to play, somehow or other contrived to know how to win. It was a capital joke to see her, while the two diplomatists were absorbed in some wonderfully important discussion, showing me her hand, and making signs in the way of asking me what she ought to do next.

"And the charming creature did it so innocently," added the Admiral's widow with immense gratification, evident in the increased buoyancy of her large cameo. "She revoked three times, my dear Miss Carruthers, in one game; she took every trick, as long as she had a trump in her hand, without the slightest attempt at following suit, and when she could no longer do that, she would throw down any little card, no

matter what, reserving her court-cards to win with."

"But wasn't that *cheating*, dear Mrs Boyle?" inquired the Hon. Belinda, solemnly.

"Nothing of the sort, my dear. The Princess Romboffski was young, innocent, and very pretty, and as our distinguished opponents did not take any notice of her proceedings, it wasn't for her partner to object. I thought the affair the best joke I ever heard of in my life—particularly when that dear, wise, gallant M. de Talleyrand paid me fifty Napoleons at the end of the rubber."

Here the brooch and the chain jumped up and down (like corks in a boiling caldron), under the influence of the rich burst of mirth with which the speaker concluded the sentence.

The listener contented herself with smiling painfully. Miss Belinda's opinions were as rigid as her person; she thought the Princess Romboffski anything but honest, and her dear friend Mrs Admiral Boyle not quite so particular in forming acquaintances as she ought to have been.

In the mean time the other pair had not been silent. Old Lady Dewlap rarely was, never was

when she could find an attentive listener, and such it appeared she had now found.

“It was very shocking, my dear, wasn’t it?” she was asking, and without waiting for a reply, proceeded, “Captain Gregory of the Blues was quite a lady-killer, I assure you; and it is true that Lord Rotherdale was a brute to his wife, who was one of the most charming women ever seen in the Pavilion. Indeed, the Prince noticed her so much that Mrs Fitzherbert was in dudgeon about it, I assure you.”

“Dear me,” exclaimed Miss Lavinia, apparently feeling the deepest interest.

“Yes, my dear,” continued the gossip, “I heard it on the Steine from one of the Prince’s equerries the morning after she had taken his Royal Highness to task about it, and they very nearly came to a quarrel on account of Lady Rotherdale.”

“Is it possible?” cried Miss Fotheringay.

“Yes, my dear, and Captain Gregory of the Blues was seen in Lady Rotherdale’s carriage on the Hone road, the very day that Lord Rotherdale was sent by the Prince to Carlton House.

The week afterwards, the Captain got leave of absence for a month's shooting on the Moors, and Lady Rotherdale received a pressing summons to join her mother at Harrowgate: but two days later his Lordship received the astounding intelligence that his lady was living in a retired cottage at Tunbridge Wells."

"Shocking! dear Lady Dewlap, positively shocking!" cried Miss Lavinia, apparently very much affected.

"Hearts are trumps!" chuckled forth Mrs Admiral Boyle, turning up the ace, at sight of which good fortune, bright eyes, fat cheeks, triple chin, and capacious bosom, exhibited a common impulse.

Conspicuous was the hostess in her favourite dove-coloured silk, looking over some music in a portfolio that rested on a Canterbury. Beside her, leaning over a harp, stood her pupil in a light muslin dress and broad blue sash. She was in a very animated manner conversing with a young lady who sat at the piano. The peculiar display of hair, indeed the entire costume, was sufficient to point out Miss Clara Harcourt to those who knew her. Clara was Miss Massey's

singing mistress, but Miss Lawson and her charge were too well bred to let this be known.

The former appreciated this young lady's musical talent highly, and having some knowledge of the uncongenial life she led at Half-Moon Street, occasionally invited her to prolong her visit to the next day. Though she was received on the footing of a guest, her assistance at the little musical parties given at Hampton Court invariably received professional acknowledgment.

Mabel was an enthusiast in music, and had become partial to the society of her singing mistress, whose painful position she often discussed with Miss Lawson. Miss Harcourt felt the kindness with which she was treated, and did her best to deserve the good opinion of her patronesses. Indeed, her visits to Hampton Court were the most enjoyable incidents in her career. There she was no longer artificial and theatrical; there she had no Madame Waverley Montgomery to dread. She could with perfect safety be natural and sincere, and she did her best to be both.

The two girls were in the habit of chatting

together unrestrainedly, for Miss Lawson having satisfied herself that there was nothing to be apprehended from treating the young artist with confidence, did not interfere in the slightest degree with the sociality of the young people, and so the one was sometimes amused with accounts of London entertainments which the other had recently enjoyed.

“Oh, I must tell you of Mrs Digby Shirley’s *conversazione*,” said the fair Cantatrice, her face becoming extremely animated. “The family, you ought to know, have lately taken a house in Belgravia, and are evidently extremely ambitious of being thought fashionable, though they have not the most remote claim to anything of the kind.”

“Who is Mrs Digby Shirley?” inquired Mabel.

“She is the wife of a lawyer, dear Miss Massey, and that is about all I know of her. Her manners do not indicate a very high origin, nevertheless she affects amazing state and dignity. Indeed, it is impossible sometimes to keep a steady countenance when she is most grand in her behaviour and appearance.”

“Does she give nice parties?”

“She contrives to get together all sorts of people, literary, artistic, musical, very strange creatures a good many; but now and then there may be discovered amongst them one or two worth knowing.”

“Oh, I like clever people. Did you meet with any one particularly distinguished?”

“No one you would care to know anything about, I think. There was, however, at the last *conversazione* a young gentleman Mrs Shirley had invited solely with the hope that he might fall in love with one of her daughters.”

“Are they very pretty?”

“Not remarkable in that way; indeed, the elder I consider positively disagreeable; but I was exceedingly amused at her manœuvres to make a lasting impression on the heart if not on the mind of the young gentleman I have just referred to.”

“Was he particularly taken with her?”

“Not at all. He was obliged to be civil to her, as he was not only her father’s guest, but an articled clerk or pupil to the firm to which that gentleman belongs; but if I am not very greatly

mistaken, Mr Geoffrey Tempest knows his own value too well to be so easily ensnared."

Miss Lawson had heard every word of the conversation, though she had not given it particular attention, but at the name of Tempest she paused and looked up.

"Mr Geoffrey Tempest!" repeated Mabel.

"Yes, the nephew of Sir Nigel Tempest, who possesses a place somewhere in Lancashire."

"Warfdale Tower," added the other quietly; "before I came here I lived close to it."

"Perhaps you know Mr Geoffrey Tempest, Miss Massey."

"Very slightly. I have seen him once or twice, but that was some years ago."

"I hear that he has an elder brother."

"Quite true, Miss Harcourt," interposed Miss Lawson. "Sir Nigel is a very old friend of mine. But here is the duet for which I have been so long looking."

The music mistress was in a moment professionally attentive. Mr Geoffrey Tempest and the Digby Shirleys were at once sent to Coventry, as she placed the printed sheets before her. Mabel as readily put her portion on her

desk, and the two instruments simultaneously commenced with so grand a crash that it quite drowned Mrs Wilkins's small voice as she entered the room announcing "the Rev. Cecil Mildmay."

Miss Lawson received that gentleman with the regard due to his position; but she did not fail to take a sly glance at his cravat, which, as might have been expected, was tumbled and creasy, as if it had been worn a month.

He looked at the card-players, but they were so engrossed by their game that none had noticed his entrance. Mrs Admiral Boyle was in a violent state of jocose agitation, winning all before her; and Lady Dewlap was so intent on relating a piece of obsolete scandal, that she trumped her partner's trick, to the extravagant delight of the Admiral's fat widow, whose personal decorations thereupon worked up and down like the piston of a steam-engine under pressure.

The chaplain drew a chair near the performers, and surrendered his attentions now to the nimble fingers of the pianoforte player, now to those of the harpist. Presently he raised his eyes to their faces, and appeared to think

them worthy of his scrutiny, for he looked long first at one and then at the other. He dwelt on the first, not because he admired it the most, but because it was strange to him.

The fair objects of this attention, having their eyes upon their music, were, it might be presumed, insensible of the compliment that was being paid to them; nevertheless both were perfectly aware of the reverend gentleman's presence.

The Rev. Cecil Mildmay was a bachelor of rather large experience in that state. He was tolerably good-looking and gentleman-like in appearance and manners. He was in prodigious request at the little evening parties perpetrated by the more social of his congregation, where he and Dr Gosling, the medical practitioner most appealed to by the residents at the Palace, were frequently the only gentlemen in the party. Hence he was quite a triton among such minnows.

But he was far too sensible to give himself airs of importance. Even could he have profited by the small supply of marriageable humanity in such a market, he knew that his

Chaplaincy brought him but a hundred a year, and that this sum was insufficient to marry upon, particularly a wife taken out of a Royal Palace. So he went on from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year, doing his duties irreproachably, and making himself as amiable out of the pulpit as he was mild in it.

It was not to be expected that the gentleman should have been so long in such a dove-cote without wishing to appropriate some of its turtles, but this occurred in his dreams only. No young lady had attracted him so much as Miss Massey. She was not only the youngest member of his flock, but she was infinitely the handsomest. No one could help admiring her. If the Lord Chamberlain had seen her, perhaps Miss Lawson might have acquired apartments with a drawing-room. The Chaplain admired her, but prudently waited for substantial preferment before he allowed his admiration to manifest itself conspicuously.

He thought himself quite safe, when he sat down and watched the face of the harp-player through a page of rapid arpeggios, and wondered if St Cecilia had ever looked half as

beautiful or played her favourite instrument half as well. And he *was* quite safe. He might admire, and he might dream,—the substantial preferment was very far off, the wife he aspired to at an unreachably distance.

“Single, double, and the rub,” cried Mrs Admiral Boyle as audibly as she could, full of pleasurable excitement, that made her expansive bust shake like jelly. “You finished very well, my dear, in the last game—very well indeed; in consequence of which your friend Miss Lavinia’s king fell to my ace. I remember I played once with old Dr Penruddock, and the Dowager Duchess of Devonshire, and Major Singlebatch, when the dear old doctor, who was famous for his whist parties and his agreeable suppers in Hanover Square, lost the game and the rubber just in the same way. Oh! it was the best joke in the world, for we were playing for guinea points and five guineas on the rub, and I won twenty pounds of him. Wasn’t it droll, my dear?”

Her sense of the enjoyment of her triumph spread from her bright black eyes over her fat cheeks, down her triple chins, and dispersed itself over her expansive bosom.

“Are you fond of music, Mr Mildmay?” inquired Mabel. When her performance had concluded, she had greeted the new comer, and introduced him to her friend. She was perfectly well aware that he was fond of music—*her* music at least. “Miss Harcourt is a most accomplished musician, I am sure you must admire her playing and singing.”

“Can the young lady sing the compositions of Handel? I am very partial to Handel.”

Miss Harcourt did not wait for any pressing; she merely glanced in the direction of her hostess, and meeting there the telegraphic look she sought, commenced playing a series of tender modulations, and then sang the exquisite air, “Waft her, Angels, to the skies.”

In a moment the grave Chaplain was listening not only with his ears but with his soul. He softly drew his chair a little nearer the singer, crossed his legs, leaned back in his seat, interlaced his gloved fingers, fixed his eyes upon the ceiling, and surrendered himself to the influence of that touching melody.

It was sung admirably, indeed Mabel on one side and Miss Lawson on the other were

quite as attentive as Mr Mildmay, and equally impressed with the taste and skill of the singer. She was not now singing for display ; she knew that she was not in the concert-room, she felt that she was not under the exacting authority of Madame Waverley Montgomery,—she was developing her great natural gifts under the influence of her genuine sympathy for what was good and ennobling in the art she professed ; and the charm she evidently exerted over her three listeners throughout the performance was exhibited in their rapt enjoyment of every note.

“Thank you, my dear, you have afforded me a very great pleasure,” observed Miss Lawson, with marked tenderness of manner, when the song was finished.

“Dear Miss Harcourt, I never heard any singing that pleased me so much,” exclaimed her pupil with warm enthusiasm.

The vocalist turned round on the music-stool, expecting, of course, some commendation from the individual she had so readily volunteered to gratify. He was still in the same attitude, apparently spell-bound, fixed, immoveable.

It is probable that she was better pleased with

this silent homage than with the compliments she had just heard, for as she met the amused look of the younger lady, her sense of the gratification she experienced was displayed in a smile that Lord Wolverhampton never was fortunate enough to receive in his most agreeable moments.

“How do you like my friend Miss Harcourt’s singing, Mr Mildmay?” inquired his hostess in a key loud enough to excite his attention.

“I beg your pardon—really I fancied—indeed I quite forgot—”

The reverend gentleman started up, confusedly, disturbed out of a reverie in which he was in possession of the long-desired substantial preferment, as well as of the long-desired amiable and accomplished wife, who was entertaining his leisure from parochial business in the most delightful manner imaginable.

“I am very much obliged to Miss Harcourt. I beg leave to tender her my grateful thanks. I don’t think I ever heard my favourite Handel to such advantage. This particular air too, of all others, is the one of which I am most partial.”

Mr Mildmay ran on with nervous fluency, Miss Lawson considerately doing her best to put

him at his case, and Mabel and her friend good-naturedly helping in the conversation. Of course the latter had to sing again, and wanting no suggestion, as she was aware of the predilection of her clerical admirer, she gave another Handelian composition, with at least equal effect, although the Chaplain contrived not to lose himself this time in a vision of the future.

Then Miss Lawson made the two girls sing one of Mozart's delicious duets, which they did with so much sweetness and grace that the worshipper of Handel began for the first time in his life to waver in his fidelity. This performance was presently succeeded by a song from the Irish Melodies by Mabel, accompanying herself on the harp.

The Chaplain had heard it often, for it was "The Last Rose of Summer," but he had never heard it sung so charmingly, for the voice was full, fresh, and rich in its tones, and the singer sang it with as much feeling as taste.

As he listened, his ideas returned to the direction they had been wont to take before he had been under the spell of the brilliant vocalist he had heard for the first time that evening; and he

was just on the point of surrendering himself to the easy-chair, slippers, and dressing-gown, pretty rosewood piano in the snug parsonage parlour, with the most amiable and most attractive clergyman's wife that had ever made a substantial preferment an earthly Paradise, when his attention was diverted and his dream dispersed by the loud laugh of Mrs Admiral Boyle.

"*Our* rub again, my dear," exclaimed that lady to her partner with her usual hilarious movements. "It is so very amusing to hold such capital cards. It is as good as a comedy, my dear. Indeed, I am never half so much amused at the play as I am when I hold a good hand.

"You owe me seven and sixpence, Lady Dewlap," she added. "By the way, that reminds me of a rubber in which a bishop's lady was one of the players, who at first pretended to have scruples of conscience against touching such wicked things as cards, but having been at last persuaded to join in a harmless game or two, continued at the table till daylight. I used to joke her afterwards, for she became uncommonly fond of whist from that night: for it was the most laughable thing in the world to see her directly the good bishop's back

was turned rushing to the card-room to seize an opportunity to cut in."

The losses were paid, Miss Lavinia paying hers to her friend with not quite that passionate amount of affection which she displayed on other occasions, Lady Dewlap settling with the Admiral's widow, and taking advantage of their being left together to communicate the shocking story of poor Lady Greatorrex, who played her last stake to that good-for-nothing Sir Frederick Foljambe, who killed the injured husband in a duel at least half a century ago.

The whist-players presently joined the musical group. This necessitated other performances. The Hon. Belinda Carruthers was prevailed upon to sing "The Soldier Tired," for which she had a kind of right in the select circle in which she moved, no other lady ever venturing to attempt it in her presence. She usually sung with immense emphasis, and on this particular occasion, as if determined to take the only gentleman present by storm, was prodigiously effective.

The Chaplain, however, did not throw himself back in his chair and fix his eyes on the ceiling, or betray the slightest evidence of absence of mind.

It was quite clear that he was not thinking of the comfortable visionary parlour in the comfortable parsonage of the future — at least the Hon. Belinda's aquiline nose and high cheek-bones would most assuredly not have been there if he had. If he entertained any particular wish at that precise moment, it would have been for cotton-wool in his ears.

It was next Miss Lavinia Fotheringay's turn, and she chose to exhibit her vocal powers in the equally trying "*Una voce.*" She too sung at the Chaplain, and with all her might, but the reverend gentleman was evidently of a very peace-loving nature. He was not disposed to imagine such a noisy bravura as the enjoyment of his leisure when the substantial preferment he was so fond of anticipating arrived. He liked the ending of it, and in acknowledgment of the pleasure the cessation of the performance occasioned him, applauded it cordially.

Miss Harcourt was persuaded to gratify the new comers, again sat down to the piano, and presently charmed all around her into the most perfect silence by the touching manner with which she gave "*Auld Robin Gray.*" It must

have been very impressive to restrain Mrs Admiral Boyle's everlasting thoughts upon her favourite pursuit ; it even made old Lady Dewlap oblivious to the gossip of a former generation, and the two faithful friends absolutely sat still without referring to their several conquests.

It was difficult to say which was most deeply affected, Miss Lawson or her pupil. But a more profound impression than had been made on either was being produced on the susceptible Chaplain. He was fast sinking into the usual forgetfulness of the present and suggestiveness of the future. His Hampton Court Chaplaincy was fading away, and his substantial preferment looming in the prospect—even his beloved Handel was dropping out of his life-long partiality, when he was recalled to consciousness by a silver tray coming nearly in contact with his chin, as certain steaming beverages in handsome china-cups were thrust towards him by the quiet and handy housekeeper.

“Tea or coffee, Sir?”

Mr Mildmay stared as his eyes fell upon the smirking homely visage of Mrs Wilkins. She was evidently in a most comfortable state of mind. These evening parties were her particular

enjoyment, and when she entered with the refreshments she looked about her—particularly at the signs of luxury brought forward on these occasions—as if she felt a large access of importance in the display.

So with her best dress and her best manners she had noiselessly approached the visionary, with the silver cream-jug shining like a mirror, and the choice china glowing with the brightest pigments. Notwithstanding the intense amiability of her looks and the hospitality of her errand, the Chaplain wished the old woman at Jericho. He accepted his coffee, however, and greatly scandalized that model of economic housekeepers by appropriating nearly all the cream and helping himself twice to sugar, in the confusion of mind her sudden apparition had produced.

As she left him, the ballad concluded amid a burst of genuine encomiums; the two faithful friends being the loudest and the most voluble in praise of the singer, though feeling how completely their own vocal exhibitions had been thrown into the shade.

Then came the flow of conversation and of tea and coffee; for the talking became as general

as the sipping as soon as the smiling Mrs Wilkins had completed her rounds. Mr Mildmay was expected by the members of his congregation to be communicative, and he seemed to feel the demand upon his sociality, for he contrived to talk to every lady in turn ; going with his coffee-cup in his hand from chair to chair, and readily entering upon every subject that he believed would be most acceptable to her.

Somehow or other he lingered longest beside Clara and Mabel — now addressing one, now the other, almost exclusively about music. His knowledge was confined to church music, but with the assistance of the two girls he contrived to talk about secular productions quite as sensibly as persons who affect the greatest familiarity with both.

Miss Lawson kept her other guests in full communicativeness, yet the Hon. Belinda and Miss Lavinia could not refrain from casting uneasy glances in the direction of the gratified and well-employed Chaplain. They had spoken warmly in praise of Miss Harcourt's singing, but now interchanged whispered criticisms about her acting. They agreed that she was a flirt. Miss

Carruthers pronounced her vulgar; Miss Fotheringay stigmatized her as very conceited. Nevertheless half an hour later both asked to be introduced to her, and treated her with extraordinary attention during the rest of the evening.

When the party was breaking up and the visitors were shawling and cloaking to return to their several sets of rooms, the steadfast friends had individually succeeded, as each thought, in establishing the most confidential relations with the attractive stranger.

“Dear Miss Harcourt,” exclaimed the Hon. Belinda in the gushing manner that distinguished her, “I hope that you will soon afford us the happiness of seeing you again. It is not often, I assure you, that we meet with so charming a companion. I was just your age and had very much your appearance, my dear, when I was first presented to the officers of the Tenth, the most captivating, the most fastidious of beaux. Yet I assure you they pronounced my *début* the most successful they remembered. The dear Colonel, how fond he was of me! Lavinia will tell you all about that. Nice girl Lavinia Fotheringay. What splendid hair she has, hasn’t she?”

Then she added in a whisper,—

“It was bought of Truefitt.”

And she hurried away laughing.

Presently came the other turtle-dove.

“Ah, Miss Harcourt, I am so sorry I must leave you!” she said. “Pray come to us again as soon as you can. I so wish to be considered amongst your friends. What a wonderful musical talent you possess! and your manner reminds me so strongly of what my admirers in the gallant Tenth used to rave about so. Belinda will tell you what an immense favourite I was with those dear seductive fellows. I thought the poor Major would go out of his mind. Charming girl Belinda Carruthers, and one can’t help admiring her fine set of teeth.”

Then she added in a lower voice,—

“Cartwright received a hundred guineas for them.”

And she also fled, laughing, out of the room.

The Chaplain shook hands with everybody and said everything that was appropriate to each in turn, but his mind had not quite recovered its equilibrium, for he lingered the last; then, as if making a desperate resolution, shook hands for

the second time with his hostess and her young companions, and hurried down the cork-screw stair-case that descended to the outer door, where Mrs Wilkins waited to drop her valedictory curtesey and fasten up securely for the night.





CHAPTER XVII.

SUNDAY AT HAMPTON COURT.



THANK Heaven ! there is one day of the week which in England can be called a day of rest. Were the observance of Sunday nothing more than a political institution, it would be one of the dearest, possessed and enjoyed by the people. All estates of men look forward to it as a day of repose, and specially of domestic comfort and happiness. However humble may be the enjoyment attainable, there are none so poor among us, but desire to attain some particular indulgence or gratification for themselves and their children on a Sunday, that may make it happy. Puritanism marked the day with an austere observance, of which the spirit partially survives : but time and progress are smoothing down the edges of

such austerity, while the good work that the Puritans enforced, remains. Our English Sunday is not a day of toil. How would the Roundheads wonder if they could contrast a Sunday at Hampton Court such as they knew it when "stout Oliver" was there, and a Sunday at the same place in the reign of Queen Victoria! No experiment of the Government has ever proved more satisfactory than that of opening the galleries and gardens of Hampton Court to the public on Sunday afternoon. It would be impossible for the most acrid and severe sectarian to contemplate the crowds of homely, toilsome artisans with their wives and children, passing through those galleries—all orderly, and cleanly, and good-humoured, and respecting the property they are allowed to enjoy, without acknowledging that the spectacle is impressive and encouraging. It is encouraging, because it strengthens the hands and hearts of those who are the true friends of labour (and not the ostentatious would-be *patrons* of the humble and the lowly),—and it gives them a *πov στω* in urging upon the Government of the country an enlarged and nationally developed scheme, for granting the sons of toil in

every crowded hive of business, an opportunity for refreshing both mind and body upon God's good Sabbath. The unctuous Sabbatarian no doubt exudes with holy anger at the thought of any public gallery or national institute being opened on the afternoon of England's day of rest! "Why not open all your places of amusement likewise?" saith he—

"'With fiddling, feasting, dancing, drinking, masquing,
And other things which may be had for asking.'

Why not make ours a Continental Sabbath?"

Oh, well-to-do Pharisaic Gospeller,

"Broad-cloth without, and a *cold* heart within,"

—is there no difference between the places which are open for gain, for speculation, for trade, and those which yield no *gain* except to the visitor, whose feelings and thoughts are elevated, chastened or instructed by the beauties of nature or of art; those which make the mind busy with no *speculations* except such as lead us in wonder and delight to recognize the affluence and love of our Creator-Father; those which have no relations with *trade*, except in reminding the craftsman that he enjoys a day of blessed rest once a week, when he can

shake off the dust of work, and be the peer of the noblest in a dearly earned repose?

Oh! well-to-do Pharisee in softly cushioned pew, *comfortably* partaking the consolations of thy profession at mid-day, and in still more softly padded chair at a later hour ruminating and digesting [both meats and doctrines together, lubricated with the choicest wines,—art thou amongst thy “fine old Masters,” and thy valued specimens of the Modern School, thy inlaid cabinets, thy Sèvres and Chelsea and Dresden, thy damask draperies and velvet-pile, thy shaven lawns, and shady avenues, and emerald fields,—art thou a righteous judge in Israel, a fair Dictator fitted to decide and to proclaim what limner’s art the poor man shall not see, because it is the Sabbath; what National Gallery or what British Museum he shall not enter, because it is the Sabbath; what Gardens, Parks, or Palaces he shall not visit, because it is the Sabbath!

“He shall live a man forbid,” thou sayest, Draco of the pulpits and the pews!

And yet, there once was One who with His disciples walked through the fields, while they plucked the ears of corn upon the Sabbath day!

In opening Hampton Court Palace and Gardens to the public on Sunday afternoon, the Government has paid the first instalment of a debt long due to the working classes of the Metropolis! Hampton Court, however, in a pecuniary sense is as much beyond the reach of the poor of London as Holyrood, geographically! How much longer a Christian country will persist in supplementing clauses to the fourth commandment as far, and so far only, as that command can be made to press upon the poor, it is hard and grievous to speculate!

Is it not a mockery of humble industry to say to it that our clubs and parks may be crowded by the upper ten thousand on the Sabbath, and that they shall be free to indulge in every gratification and luxury, but that the poor man, out of respect for Religion, shall have no resource, or gratification, save such as the "Public" offers him?

Dives in Belgravia shall be free to feast his eyes, his tastes, his senses on the seventh day, but Lazarus at the Seven-Dials, or Clare-Market, or Shoreditch, shall not so much as lift *his* eyes to contemplate any nobler work of Art than a pewter-pot!

Hampton Court Gardens and Bushby Park were in unusually rich foliage. The chestnuts had never been seen in more superb flower. Thousands of Londoners flocked to Hampton, and pic-nics were held in every direction under the spreading trees. On a certain Sunday, it was suggested that the Digby Shirleys, under conduct of Mr Geoffrey Tempest, should drive down to see the chestnuts. The girls greatly enjoyed the prospect, and strongly urged their mamma to obtain Shirley's consent. An empty pew, and "What will Sir Jonathan Pole say?" were severe obstacles in the way of the proposed enjoyment. Internally Shirley enjoyed the idea amazingly. Externally Shirley saw grave objections. "He was always delighted for the dear girls to have any innocent recreation—but really Mr Tempest's idea of starting early in the morning was not to be thought of. Could they not drive down in the afternoon, when the morning service was over?" Geoffrey Tempest had his own objections, which he kept to himself; but eventually a compromise was effected by the astute Maria. They might attend the early service at Kensington church. Kensington was on the way to Hampton. If

Papa remained in Town and occupied his own pew, and accounted for the absence of the family by saying they had gone to Kensington, appearances would be kept up, the inquiries of the Poles answered, and if the whole truth was not told, at least the *suppressio veri* would not amount to an actual fib !

Shirley's head shook disapprovingly, while his face smiled acquiescence. He called Maria "a clever puss," and Maria knew she had won her point.

Early service at Kensington was attended by the Shirley family. It cannot be said that any of the party were in a proper frame of mind to derive benefit from the devotions in which they formally joined. Georgey pronounced the singing of the charity-children "absurd," Mrs Shirley thought the curate a "very well-bred young gentleman, who would have read tolerably well if his r's had not all tumbled out of the alphabet to have their places supplied with w's." Maria inquired of Geoffrey how he liked the sermon ; and Geoffrey, expressing his sentiments in legal form, proclaimed it "a very dry piece of documentary evidence," which so shocked Mrs Shirley that

she demanded if he was not "afraid to speak evil of dignitaries!" However, the Shirleys had, as they considered, done their duty for truth's sake and their conscience, and straightway proceeded to Hampton Court.

Arrived at their destination, it was necessary to wait until the morning service in the Palace Chapel was concluded, when the galleries and grounds would be opened. Leaving the ladies to arrange their bonnets and cloaks at the Mitre, Geoffrey strolled out, as he said, "to look after the horses." In reality he strolled into the Palace quadrangle and made his way to the Chapel.

In that remarkable edifice, which, not being included in the public exhibition, is rarely visited by the ordinary sight-seer, a full congregation was joining with every appearance of devotion in the religious exercises appointed for the day.

Almost every one of the inmates of the Court was present. Even the venerable Duchess, who laboured under the worst infirmities of extreme old age, was to be recognized in her plaid scarf at her accustomed place in the gallery, once set

apart for Royal Christians, with her silver ear-trumpet raised in the hope of hearing some words of comfort.

Another octogenarian, the equally well-known Lady Dalrymple, was in the same seat she had occupied on similar occasions for the last thirty years. She had not sufficient eye-sight left to see the clergyman, though he was within a few yards of her, but then she enjoyed the advantage of hearing him distinctly.

Hampton-Court Chapel is an unusual place of worship, as any one entering it for the first time must acknowledge. The roof, resplendent with gilding, is elaborately carved in a style of decoration that seems to have been designed in the statuery's yard or the undertaker's shop; and the pews and reading-desk covered with faded velvet, give the whole affair the aspect of an obsolete theatrical property.

Yet it is a Royal Chapel, full of most interesting historical associations in connection with the two rival faiths that have flourished in England since the erection of the Palace. There High Mass was performed under the

auspices of the great Cardinal, dignitaries of the Romish Church scarcely less illustrious officiating in the presence of the royal "Defender of the Faith," Rome's most dutiful son. There the dutiful son, having thrown off submission to the Pope, married Anna Boleyn, and when that Protestant Queen had been disposed of, the equally luckless Jane Seymour.

There was baptized in the reformed religion, the Protestant heir of the great Henry. There the bigoted Mary shared with the King of Spain's son the consolation of restoring the Mass in all its ancient splendour, and there her lion-hearted Protestant successor changed the service once more.

Thus it remained till the weakest of a weak line, who lost three kingdoms for one Mass, turned out the Protestant ministers, and sent in their places the particular friends of Father Petre. It has been affirmed that from these priests, assisted by monks and friars of different orders, who had come to establish themselves in "Catholic England," the infant hero of the warming-pan received the rite of baptism. It was

there that Dutch William and his buxom spouse worshipped in the simple form familiar to him in his beloved Holland.

Other changes have occurred, though Protestantism has contrived to keep its ground; but the officiating minister has ceased to preach to Royal ears since the gallery opposite the altar used to be filled with the Court of George II.

Vestiges of a Court might be recognized in the present congregation, in a superannuated mistress of the robes, three infirm ladies of the bed-chamber, half a dozen sexagenarian maids of honour, a paralytic Lord Chamberlain's daughter, an asthmatic widow of a gold stick, and a large assortment of near relatives of various officers of the Royal household, more or less damaged by old time.

All had their appointed seats, a select few sharing the honour of the Royal gallery above, not, however, without considerable heart-burnings among the less favoured below. A good deal of discontent always existed about the sittings. Some wanted to be nearer the clergyman, to be further from the organ, to be out of a draught, to be in the centre when they

were at the side, or to be at the side when they were in the centre. But the important state functionary who had the apportioning the apartments had also the arrangement of the pews, and his fiat having gone forth, the discontented had no resource but in grumbling, of which privilege many liberally availed themselves.

On entering at the door under the gallery, the tall figures of the Hon. Belinda Carruthers and Miss Lavinia Fotheringay were easily distinguished. They shared the same seat, a little in advance of that instrument of Father Smidth which has pealed forth its grand chords to so many generations of Christians; and they generally shared the same prayer and hymn-books.

Their conduct was irreproachable during divine service; apparently they forgot the officers of the ultra-fashionable Hussar regiment they were so inordinately fond of quoting elsewhere, and thought only of their religious duties. Nevertheless they invariably made a particularly careful toilette, and looked towards the door frequently in the early part of the service, as if among the general public who entered at that door, chiefly people living in the neighbourhood, they expected

to see some one on whom their gay mantles and smart bonnets would not be entirely thrown away.

There, too, was the Dowager Lady Dewlap, looking, good old soul, as if she had never uttered a word of scandal in her life. Nothing could surpass the fervour with which she repeated the prayer to be delivered from evil speaking, lying, and slandering. It was quite edifying to observe her devotional look and absorbed appearance. No one would have suspected that the volume on which she was gazing so intently was held upside down.

In the next pew shone the fat face of Mrs Admiral Boyle. Much to her credit, directly she heard the opening sentence, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness," she composed her features as well as her body to a serene quietude. She seemed to feel a peculiar sense of comfort whenever that sentence commenced the service. It was the wicked *man* whose turning away from misdoing was referred to. As there was not a word said of female shortcomings, she felt that there was nothing *she* need apprehend. So she continued, exceedingly con-

tented and serene, to give her attention to what followed.

She joined in the responses, she assisted in the psalms, she listened to the anthem with admirable propriety of demeanour. No one could look at her placid plump features and imagine that their owner ever set her mind upon such frivolous things as playing cards. That fixed expression surely characterized a serious disposition: that mildly reverential gaze, a truly religious nature.

So a stranger might have surmised up to the commencement of the sermon, often to about half-way through it. But beyond that, the influence of a powerful restraint would not go. A suspicious drooping of her triple chin upon her voluminous bosom showed that even Mr Mildmay's gentle arguments were being urged in vain.

This was not a solitary case, as the estimable Chaplain was well aware, but he was unconscious that it arose from any somnolency in his discourse.

Miss Lawson's pew was at the side of the reading-desk, partly facing the congregation.

It was while the reverend gentleman was proceeding with his sermon in his most nervous manner, that Mabel allowed her eyes to stray for a few minutes from the preacher towards the door, which had just been opened. A young man of gentlemanly appearance had entered, and although his demeanour was not in the slightest degree offensive, it was easy to see that he regarded the place with curiosity rather than with reverence.

Mabel started involuntarily. The features were well known to her. They were those of Blount Tempest. She wondered why he had left Oxford. She wondered why he should come there so unexpectedly. She wondered more to see him stare at the roof and at the altar, as if he had never seen them before.

The intruder did indeed behave as if the meretricious carving on the pendent bosses of the roof was a prodigy of art; then he dwelt with more satisfaction on the triumphs of wood-sculpture from the graceful chisel of Grinling Gibbons. They excused his admiration. The figures in the former surprised him by their

coarseness, the work in the latter astonished him by its delicacy.

At last he directed his scrutiny to the rows of bonneted heads that filled the area before him, the owners of which were regarding his intrusion with anything but amicable feelings. He glanced carelessly over them all, over the Roman noses and high cheek-bones of the devoted friends with supreme indifference, notwithstanding that both ladies condescended to favour him with a steady stare; over the high-dried physiognomy of the Dowager Lady Dewlap; over the fat cheek and triple chin, with eyes closed and mouth a little open, of Mrs Admiral Boyle; over even the pleasant features of the somewhat scandalized Miss Lawson; but stopped suddenly when he came to her young companion, stopped with a gaze of admiration of a far warmer character than he had a minute or two before directed to the *chef-d'œuvre* around the altar-piece.

Mabel withdrew her glance at once. She was quite certain that the stranger was *not* Blount. He never would have stared at her so rudely. Besides, his style of dress was different, and his

manners equally so. The resemblance, however, was remarkable both in height and in face.

She stole another glance at him, hoping that by this time he was looking another way. Their eyes met, those of the young man expressed the most passionate admiration, and were still fixed upon her countenance. He was under the gallery, leaning against a carved pillar with folded arms, engrossed by the bright vision that he had so suddenly beheld.

Mabel did not look again. She turned her face resolutely in the direction of the Chaplain, and endeavoured to fix her attention on the remainder of the sermon, but there was a feeling of bewilderment that interfered a good deal with her desire to concentrate her thoughts on Mr Mildmay's discourse.

At last the sermon was over, and the congregation began to disperse. Miss Lawson and her pupil lingered till the clergyman returned from the vestry, and walked between them as far as his own lodgings. There they parted, and the ladies turned into one of the innumerable passages that led to their apartments.

Nothing more had been seen of the stranger,

very much to Mabel's relief, and as she followed Miss Lawson up the narrow winding stair-case she began to feel a returning sense of security. A slight noise below made her lean against the central post round which the stair winds, and look down the well. She uttered a faint cry of terror, for her eyes rested upon an upturned face, wonderfully like Blount's, but it alarmed her the more because she knew it was not Blount.

She was so confused between surprise and apprehension, that she went at once into her room without mentioning the strange circumstance to her friend, and lost several minutes wondering who the intrusive stranger could be, and what could have induced him to follow her home. Presently, however, she returned to the sitting-room where Miss Lawson awaited her.

Without the slightest preparation that lady entered upon the subject that had so greatly disturbed her pupil.

"Did you notice a stranger enter the chapel during the sermon?" she inquired,—“a young man rather over-dressed.”

“Yes, I saw him. I could not help observing him, he was so exceedingly rude.”

“Did you remark a likeness to any one you know?”

“Yes, dear Miss Lawson. I thought him very like Blount. Indeed, I thought he was Blount for a few minutes.”

“I have not the slightest doubt that he is Blount’s brother. I have not seen Geoffrey for some time, but I know that he is in London, and probably Miss Harcourt has again met him, and has said something about you which has sent the young gentleman here to judge for himself.”

Mabel laughed, and now only wondered how she could have been so foolish as to feel uneasy because Blount’s brother had looked at her. The ladies had a little further talk on the subject and then dismissed it.

Miss Lawson’s explanation was partly true. Geoffrey Tempest had heard of the beauty of Miss Massey from her music mistress, and the description had been so highly coloured that having promised the ladies of the Shirley family a drive to Hampton Court, he had hired a phaëton and pair, and taken them down early that morning in time to breakfast at the Mitre, where he had left them to enjoy themselves,

while he, as he said, went to look after the horses and smoke a cigar. Instead of which he bent his steps to the chapel, where he soon recognized the object of his search; moreover with the dexterity of a lover of the old school of gallantry, he had lost no time in tracing her to her home.

“What a time you have been seeing after the comfort of those stupid horses!” exclaimed Miss Maria, regarding him reproachfully.

“Perhaps they are valuable, my dear,” observed her mamma. “And as Mr Tempest is responsible for their safe return, it is only proper prudence in him to see that they are not exchanged for inferior animals. I knew an instance of the kind happening to a friend of mine in the aristocracy—Lady Whappleshaw, who borrowed a pair of matchless steeds such as a lady of title might be expected to drive, and they took her to West Wickham. After dark she drove them back again, but when her ladyship sent them home, the horse-dealer swore they had been exchanged, and absolutely made my friend Lady Whappleshaw pay him two hundred guineas as the value of the magnificent pair he had lent her.”

The absurdity of the story was not lost upon the young man, who was quite as well up in horse-flesh as he was in law, but he was getting familiar with Mrs Shirley's bounce about aristocratic friends, and her blunders respecting their proceedings. With as grave a face as he could assume, he dwelt on the immense price he should have to pay if the splendid animals—they were the ordinary hacks—with which he had been intrusted should disappear like those of her ladyship.

The breakfast then proceeded in due course, every one doing justice to the delicacies provided, Mrs Shirley setting a good example, and only stopping in her attentions to the pigeon-pie to impress "her young friend," as she condescended to style Mr Geoffrey Tempest, with her familiarity with the Peerage, by quoting Lady Whappleshaw about every five minutes.

Miss Maria thought her mamma "very absurd," but prudently kept her opinion to herself. She affected to have no appetite, but a little pressing from her cavalier, whom she now began to fancy her exclusive property, sufficed to stimulate an attempt at a delicate slice of ham and a

wing of chicken which he placed on her plate. Her younger sister either was not ashamed of being hungry, or not in a humour to be sentimental, for she ate of everything offered her, laughing and talking the whole time, evidently in the most perfect state of enjoyment.

Mr Geoffrey Tempest did his best to keep up the spirits of his party. He was jocose with Georgey, quoted poetry to Maria, and listened respectfully to the apocryphal anecdotes of their mamma; but he wished the party at the bottom of the Red Sea. His nature seemed to have imbibed a new spirit. That graceful form and lovely face had taken possession of him so entirely that Maria's tenderness, Georgey's pleasantry, and Mrs Shirley's aristocratic affectation, became at last absolutely odious.

It would be impossible to describe his sense of relief when his fair companions acknowledged themselves ready to accompany him to the picture-galleries; he was even reconciled to having Maria on his arm, when he found himself approaching the home of that beautiful creature, who in every feminine attribute appeared to him so complete a contrast to her.

He tried to rattle on the usual small talk current on such occasions, anxious that his companion should not discover the pre-occupation of his thoughts. He pointed out everything worthy of notice, constantly turning round to show the same courtesy to her mamma, which the young lady considered perfectly superfluous, as it marred the confidential relations she was anxious to maintain with the companion of her walk.

Mrs Shirley had a good deal to say. She was aware that she had entered a Royal palace, and deemed it essential that she should let every one know how completely at home she was in such a place. She spoke with a loud voice, constantly referring to the names and customs of great people, and as she was very much over-dressed, she had every reason to hope that she might be taken for one of that exclusive set. Sunday however is not a day when distinguished company are expected at Hampton Court, and although several persons turned round and stared at her, they were chiefly wives of mechanics or of small trades-people, whose notice was not at all of a respectful kind.

Of course the party stopped at the Cartoons.

Mrs Shirley was in ecstasies about the largeness of the figures in the foreground.

“Ah, great people were great people then, Mr Tempest,” she said, loud enough to be heard throughout the hall. “It must have been a most covetable privilege to have lived in those days. What is the use of being one of the aristocracy, if the humble classes don’t feel their insignificance in your presence? Here you see, my dear young friend, is exactly what I mean. These are people of distinction evidently, and the artist has done justice to their importance.”

Mr Tempest agreed that the individuals represented were not likely to be overlooked: he might have added, even by a spectator from the top of the nearest house, so monstrously were they out of proportion with the accessories of the picture.

Georgey ventured to say that they were the finest men she had ever seen, and asked if they belonged to Frederick the Great’s regiment of grenadiers. Miss Maria said she wondered at her sister’s exceedingly masculine taste, but she was always so very absurd. For her part, she did not care for giants. Her taste was a good deal less

ambitious. Hereupon she breathed a sigh, and looked pensive.

The party moved on. In due time they stopped at the "Miraculous Draught of Fishes."

"When I was with dear Lady Whappleshaw last season at Brighton," observed Mrs Shirley impressively, "I took particular notice of the fishing-boats. They were not in the least like the boat in that picture."

"I dare say," observed the young lawyer, admirably maintaining his gravity, "that Raphael knew what he was about. In delineating the vessel so small and the fishermen so large, he was merely striving to do justice to the superiority of his characters, over the accessories of his picture, much as we observed it just now in the 'Beautiful Gate.'"

"Of course," said the lady, perfectly satisfied, "they must have been persons of importance. You know it's not at all unusual for noblemen in our time to belong to the Fishmongers' Company. Dear Lady Whappleshaw's husband, as well as many more of my aristocratic friends, are members of that wealthy Corporation."

Mr Geoffrey did not venture upon any ad-

ditional remark on that subject, and presently they were proceeding through the long suite of rooms devoted to the pictures. At first Mrs Shirley had a fair amount of artistic criticism ready, but when she became aware of the enormous number of pictures there were for her to look at, her commentaries became less and less. At last, after they had come to "the Beauties," she hurried Georgey through the half-dozen remaining rooms. Whether she disliked the expression of some of the faces or the looseness of some of their dresses, or whether the good lady felt that she had had quite enough of picture seeing, it is certain that the bed furniture and portraits of the "favourites" were scarcely looked at.

There were still a portion of the customary round of sights to see, and the attentive cavalier seemed desirous that none should be missed. Not that he was very anxious to gratify the ladies, young and old, whom he had the honour of escorting, but he went from place to place with the hope of seeing again the face that had so charmed him in the chapel. He dallied around the pond of gold-fish, he lounged through the gardens, and sauntered under the great Vine, but

without meeting anything in the slightest degree resembling the bright vision of the morning.

At last he wandered into the Maze, and his mind was so affected by his disappointment that the tender Maria found no difficulty in giving the slip to her mamma and sister, without attracting his attention. It was only when the young lady feigned to be greatly alarmed, hurrying from one blind alley into another, and affecting to be "completely lost," that he seemed to wake up to consciousness.

He tried to soothe her alarm, but the more soothing his words became, the more excited became the young lady. She rushed along the narrow paths of the labyrinth in a state of apparent frenzy, and of course Mr Geoffrey was obliged to rush after her. As they neither met with Mrs Shirley nor the way out, Miss Maria increased her pace and her fright.

In trying to overtake her, half laughing, half vexed, and crying out to the fugitive every expression he could think of likely to allay her alarm, he caught her by the waist when rapidly turning the corner of one of the alleys, and, as much to his confusion as mortification, came

suddenly face to face with the lovely creature he had seen in the chapel.

Mabel had kindly taken Mrs Wilkins's grandchild for a walk, and for the little creature's special 'amusement had led her into the Maze. The look she gave the panting Mr Geoffrey Tempest as she rapidly swept by him was not satisfactory to that young gentleman. Before he could recover his breath, she was gone.


When the young lawyer left the Digby Shirleys at their Belgravian house in Wilton Street, he made a vow that he would never be seen with them in public again; most certainly nothing should ever induce him to go within half a dozen miles of Hampton Court in their society.





CHAPTER XVIII.

A BASSO PROFONDO.

“NE pound twelve shillings and sixpence, that is the amount of my losings, I think, Signor Carbono?”

“Si, Signor, a million of thanks.

It is a grand pleasure to play with a gentleman who loses like a prince. You English Signori do not care about parting with money.”

“That depends, Signor; but when one meets with a companionable foreigner who has travelled and been used to good society, what can be the cost of a sovereign or two for the pleasure of his company?”

Saying this, the Englishman placed the sum he had just named in the dingy palm of his companion. He had counted it out of a well-filled purse somewhat unguardedly exhibited,

considering he knew he was in a gambling-house of bad repute that was carried on as a private club in the immediate neighbourhood of Golden Square.

“Ah mio amico,” replied the man, slipping the money into his waistcoat pocket with a smile of satisfaction that considerably improved his swarthy, well-whiskered, thick-moustached face, “as you have the great kindness to say, I have travelled much and associated with the nobili and gentili of your own and other nations.”

His companion quietly drew out a handsome cigar-case, and handed it across the table.

“Cospetto! they are choice Havannas,” the Italian exclaimed, helping himself, and bowing as he handed back the case.

“They are of the very best brand,” said the other, taking another from the case and manipulating it after the manner of a connoisseur in smoking. “I import them exclusively to share them with my friends.”

“Corpo di Bacco, you are my patrino,” cried the black-haired, black-whiskered man, as he drew a candle towards him, lit the end of his cigar, and began to smoke with great relish. “I

felicitate myself on making your acquaintance, Signor."

The Englishman drew his chair nearer, and proceeded to light his cigar by placing the end of it against the ignited end of that of his companion, who drew his simultaneously. Their faces were close together, their eyes looking into each other's, searchingly, during the operation. They were in this position when the Englishman, having ignited his Havanna, said with a peculiar emphasis, gazing inquiringly into the lustrous dark eyes before him: "Were you not a courier before you were a chorus singer, Signor Carbono?"

The Italian drew back his chair with a sudden start, and the dark eyes and the dark hair and the dark visage seemed equally disturbed.

"Be not offended, my dear sir," added the other, leaning back in his seat and smoking with the greatest possible composure. "No idle curiosity induces me to ask the question. It is not at all improbable that I can be of essential service to you, if you can give me a little reliable information on that point."

"Si, Signor, I was courier for some time."

The man said this with affected cheerfulness, but the light of the two candles on the table showed that he was not quite at his ease.

“Many of your compatriots employ me on different journeys. I have been as far north as St Petersburg, but that cold climate I like not at all. I have been to Spain, and—”

“You have been to Florence, I think, my dear sir?”

The Englishman said this, lolling back and watching the smoke as he puffed it forth.

“Many times, Signor; I was with Sir Brookes Noddler, and my Lord Chesterford, and —”

“And Madame Dupont?”

The question was asked in the very mildest accent, the querist watching the smoke-wreaths in the most guileless manner, nevertheless the disturbance it caused was most obvious. The dark visage seemed to turn yellow, and the lustrous eyes to shoot fire, but the questioner lolled back on his chair, which rested on the back legs, with the swing of a determined idler.

“Madame Dupont and *her child*,” he added, with marked emphasis on the last two words.

The Italian smoked with singular rapidity,

and an expression came over his by no means agreeable countenance, very much resembling the glare of a wild beast about to spring on his prey.

“I can make it well worth your while, Signor Carbono, to place confidence in me,” added the Englishman in a low but perfectly distinct voice. “I do not want to know anything about the considerable sum of money that Madame Dupont had with her when she died.”

The Italian stopped smoking.

“All that it is at all necessary for me to learn is, what became of Madame Dupont’s daughter?”

“Buono ! buono !” cried the fellow, laughing hoarsely. “The Signorina ? Non mi ricordo. It is a long time back. I remember the Signora Dupont. She died at Florence that is true ; but the Signorina,—I think there is some mistake, Signor.”

“In the first place, I can get you engaged in the chorus at the Italian Opera, Signor Carbono, a regular engagement with a good salary,” continued the Englishman, without in the slightest degree altering his position. “And I can procure constant employment for your wife, my dear sir.”

“Diavolo!” thought the other, “this fellow of an Englishman knows everything!”

“All I want is, for both of you to be ready to give evidence as to the existence of a daughter left by Madame Dupont at her decease. No harm can by any possibility happen to either, and a good round sum in gold will be ready for your acceptance as soon as your testimony has been recorded.”

“Si, Signor,” said the man, smoking again, and looking as cheerful as ever, “you do not want me to produce the Signorina? I think you said!”

“By no means; what will be required of you is much easier. You will lose no time, my dear friend, in communicating with your excellent wife, who having been the deceased lady’s confidential attendant entrusted with the charge of her infant, must naturally be supposed to know more about her than anybody else; you will prepare her, my dear sir, to state all she knows on the subject. And you will have the kindness to bring her to my house in Half-Moon Street, Piccadilly, to-morrow evening at latest, and she will then have an opportunity of conferring confidentially with

my wife, whom she will find disposed to serve her to the utmost of her power—Buona notte, Signor Carbono. It will be your own fault if you are not singing on the boards of the Italian Opera at its opening.”

“Buona notte, Signor,” replied the Italian as he rose to shake hands with his new friend, who had just sprung from his seat.

“Another cigar, my dear sir,” said Mr Montgomery, pulling out his case.

“A million thanks, Signor, they are exquisite!”

“They are to share with my friends.”

The two men shook hands and parted. The Englishman went home with the conviction that he had done a ticklish piece of work very cleverly; the Italian lit his second Havanna and remained to smoke it out.

“Cospetto!” he muttered as he threw himself into a chair. “How came that Englishman to know about the Signorina? She is as a drop of rain in the ocean.”

“And I am to be engaged in the chorus of the Grand Opera!” he added presently. “Buona. And when all is done to have a sum in gold.

Buone parole! I shall at once get Signora Carbono to remember all about the Signorina. We *shall* go together to the Strada Demi-luna, and I will have more of that Englishman's money."

With that final resolution expressed very resolutely, the ex-courier went to one of the mirrors in the room, and proceeded deliberately to comb his curly black hair and whiskers, humming an air from "Il Barbiere" during the performance with much complacency of manner. Then he took a brush from a side-table and as deliberately brushed his clothes, which appeared to have been more used to that process than was good for the cloth.

The frock-coat buttoned up to the chin concealed both waistcoat and shirt, and a pair of equally well-worn trowsers, with a stripe down the side, nearly hid the jean boots—probably because they were not in a fit state to be seen. The satin stock with the showy pin stuck in it had a similarly decayed appearance. Nevertheless, still humming the opera air with every sign of inward satisfaction, the Signor brushed a cap with a projecting peak and a gold

band, put it jauntily on the mass of black curls that covered his head, and having pulled up his faded stock and pulled down his thread-bare sleeves, stared a little at the reflection of himself, and then rang the bell.

A dapper little man with a close-cropped head and a sallow complexion, in dirty shirt sleeves, immediately made his appearance.

“Aha, Ricardo !” cried the Signor in Italian, stopping his *sotto voce* recollections of Rossini’s master-piece. “You are quick ; you thought you should be wanted, and waited near the door. Eh, Ricardo ?”

“Yes,” replied the other, rather sullenly, in the same melodious Tuscan, “I want some money, Signor Carbono. You have won of the Englishman ; you must pay me what I have been waiting for so long.”

“Basta !” exclaimed the Signor with an air of profound contempt, throwing away the end of his exquisite Havanna. “Am I not a basso profondo as good as engaged at the Grand Opera of London, and shall I not be able to pay my subscriptions to the Club as regular as any one who comes here ?”

“By the Virgin, I have heard that so often that I am tired of it, Signor Carbono.”

“You shall hear of it once more then, caro mio; and what is more, you shall hear *me*, for I shall get you orders for yourself and the Signora for the gallery.”

“I have heard that too, Signor Carbono, and am tired of that also. We do not want orders that never come; we want money, Signor Carbono, and it *must* come.”

“Buono, amico mio! Buono! and how much will content you for the present? for my winnings of the Englishman have been but small.”

“I will not be hard upon you, for you bring custom. You owe, let me see, a hundred scudi or a little more. Pay me half now, and the rest in a month or two.”

This was said by the little man with the cropped head and the dirty shirt sleeves in a gentler tone than he had hitherto used. In reply, Signor Carbono unbuttoned his coat, and from one of his waistcoat pockets produced a sovereign which he threw on the table.

“Eccolo là,” he said, buttoning up again very carefully. “There is of the Englishman’s gold.

I shall have more in a short time for you. Be satisfied with this."

The keeper of the gambling-house caught up the coin with a gleam of gratification in his dark eyes, and a cordial smile instantly broke over his purple muzzle. He bowed obsequiously.

"Addio," cried the ex-courier, as he drew on a pair of very worn gloves with an air of dignity.

"Addio, amico mio! Do me the honour to remember me to the cara sposa, and tell her that the orders shall come for the opera, for it is a fact, Ricardo, I am to be engaged for the season among the *bassi profondi* of that grand establishment."

Signor Carbono waved his hand majestically as he passed his old acquaintance on his way to the street, and then held his head up as high as ever he had done twenty years before, when his fine head of hair and luxuriant whiskers attracted so much feminine notice in the great cities of Europe through which he happened to be passing.

He strolled leisurely into the Quadrant, glanced into some of the shop-windows, as if to ascertain the prices of the most attractive articles,

which he had never before thought of doing. He looked at female ornaments with at least an equal amount of scrutiny, such as gold watches and chains, diamond rings and pearl bracelets, till it might reasonably have been presumed that he was making a selection for the Signora Carbono, anxious to study her taste and exhibit his own liberality to the utmost.

Having turned into Piccadilly without making any purchases, he strolled in the same leisurely way in the direction of Leicester Square, passed along one of its most disreputable by-streets; then taking a latch-key from his pocket, opened the private door of a shabby restaurant, and proceeded to ascend a very dirty flight of stairs.

At last he reached the top flight, where he paused to take breath. A door of one of the attics opened and a woman presented herself, whose attire was even more worn and faded than the frock-coat, the striped trowsers, the jean boots, and the satin stock of the ex-courier. But the cotton gown did not look so old as the face, the face that only twenty years before had belonged to one of the prettiest lady's maids that

ever graced the rumble of a travelling carriage.

"I was certain it was you!" she exclaimed with a faint smile, as she recognized the Italian.

"Yes, Signora Carbono, it is your faithful sposo," he replied, gallantly taking off his cap, and with much tenderness proceeding to salute the faded female. "And I have just been looking at a suite of amethysts that would become you amazingly, cara mia."

"Come in and eat your macaroni, and don't talk nonsense," she said, sadly and somewhat impatiently. "I have had some lace to wash and mend from a former mistress of mine, and so have been enabled to get you a 'good dinner. I hope you will like it."

"What an angel of a wife you are!" exclaimed the man fervently, as he noticed the clean cloth spread on the table, the smoking dish of which he was so fond, and a bottle of claret, to which he was no less partial. "Corpo di Bacco, you are a treasure beyond price."

He sat himself down to his skilfully-prepared meal, evidently in the greatest possible good humour, and having gallantly helped his wife,

took no less care of himself. He heaped his own plate as though considering his larger capacity for enjoyment, and there could be no question he enjoyed his supper thoroughly.

The faded lady's maid regarded her swarthy husband's manner of taking his repast with the most intense satisfaction, though she ate scarcely anything herself. Signor Carbone devoured his maccaroni as a Neapolitan would be sure to do, letting it dangle from his fork, and eating it *up* with every possible demonstration of gratification known to the Italian nature, in which compliments, half in English, half in Tuscan, to his poor faded wife and her superlative cookery were liberally mingled.

Presently he poured out two glasses of the bright liquid from the long-necked bottle with increased animation, and with tender gallantry handed one to his companion, then seized on the other. The fulness of his heart, if not of his stomach, was expressed in his dark eyes, as he raised the full glass between himself and the light.

"I drink to your happiness, cara mia," he exclaimed, "and to my success at the Grand

Opera," he added, nodding his black curls knowingly as he poured the draught down his throat.

"Your success at the Opera, Mr Carbono! what in the name of wonder do you mean?" she inquired.

He was again absorbed in the disappearance of another heap of the well Parmesaned delicacy which he had placed on his plate. He chuckled and winked his dark eyes merrily as he dropped the savoury coils into his big moustached mouth.

"Aha, my cara sposa does not know!" he laughingly replied, "that she is the wife of a basso profondo, and the distinction that is in store for her when she shall hear him singing the compositions of his immortal countryman, Rossini, from the stage of the Grand Opera of London."

"I know that you have been anxious for an engagement to sing somewhere for a very long time, but I knew not there was any chance of your getting one."

"Oho, some people think better of Signor Carbono than the Signora his wife, for I am able to delight her little heart with the good news

I shall be engaged for the season, at a salary which shall enable her to live as a *bella padrona*. Is it not good news, *idola mia*?"

"Indeed it is, I hope it isn't too good to be true," cautiously answered the wife, who perhaps had been disappointed too often to be sanguine on hearing such intelligence. "But how was it brought about, Mr Carbono?"

The ex-courier continued to consume the farinaceous diet that had been so carefully provided for him, washing it down from time to time with a glass of claret, and winking and chuckling with immense energy, till he had excited his companion's curiosity to the fullest extent, and equally satisfied his own hunger.

"Aha, Signora Carbono!" he cried at last, exultantly, "you desire to know what brought your faithful marito this good fortune. You are a good wife, I will have no secrets. It is true I have some musical knowledge and a deep bass voice, and since I gave up travelling I have aspired to join some operatic company. Well, I have always failed to get an engagement as you know, *cara*; but this day I have had the happiness to fall in with an Englishman, who promised to

help me to secure the object of my ambition. I am to sing regularly in the chorus of the Grand Opera, with a handsome recompense to be paid every week."

"Oh, Mr Carbono, I am very glad indeed!" The poor faded face looked quite fresh and charming under the influence of the pleasurable feelings the unexpected intelligence had created.

"Yes, it is true," he added; "but my good fortune is conditional. I am to have it only in case I can give information respecting the little girl that was with your bella padrona when she died at Florence."

The smiling face suddenly became deadly pale.

"Oh, Mr Carbono, don't say anything about that," she cried piteously, as she clasped her hands together. "The money never did us any good! We never prospered afterwards."

"Bah! then it is time that we should prosper now," replied the man. "It seemed an easy way to make oneself comfortable, and so I induced you to consent to it."

The faded lady's maid wrung her hands, and tears fell down her cheeks.

"But remember we are only required to tell

what we know respecting the Signorina; I suspect she has been discovered, and the friends of your bella padrona are trying to establish her identity."

"If we could help in getting the dear child her rights," said his wife, "I should not mind what I did."

"But you *must* mind. Cospetto! you must be careful what you do as well as what you say," urged the ex-courier impressively. "I have promised you shall go with me to this Englishman's house, when you are to see this Englishman's wife. You will affect to know nothing respecting the Signorina till you have heard what they want you to say about her. You have been a good wife to me, and, Diavolo! I have been much to blame in getting you into this trouble, but you must show your sense as well as your goodness, to benefit poor bad Marco Carbono in this affair.

"When I have engagement at the Grand Opera, I shall not leave you to go to the club; I shall have piano and learn my parts at home, and we will live in a respectable house, and my wife shall have everything she likes for her dress, for

her dinner, for everything she choose. I shall have plenty money for mia marito. Say it is a bargain, and I will drink success to the Signorina. We will do all we can to procure her good fortune. It is proper—it is right—and we shall then be prosperous. You will help poor bad Marco Carbono, and make him good for the rest of his life.”

The great black curly head was very near the faded face when the last sentence was spoken, and, as may be imagined, a consent to aid the worthless husband, was ultimately extorted from the subservient wife.

THE END OF VOL. I.

ERRATA.

Page 134, line 12, *for* tell, *read* tells.

137, line 23, *for* Orfanotrovio, *read* Orfanotrofio.



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